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THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER

HENRY HOLT & CO. PUBLISHERS

New York

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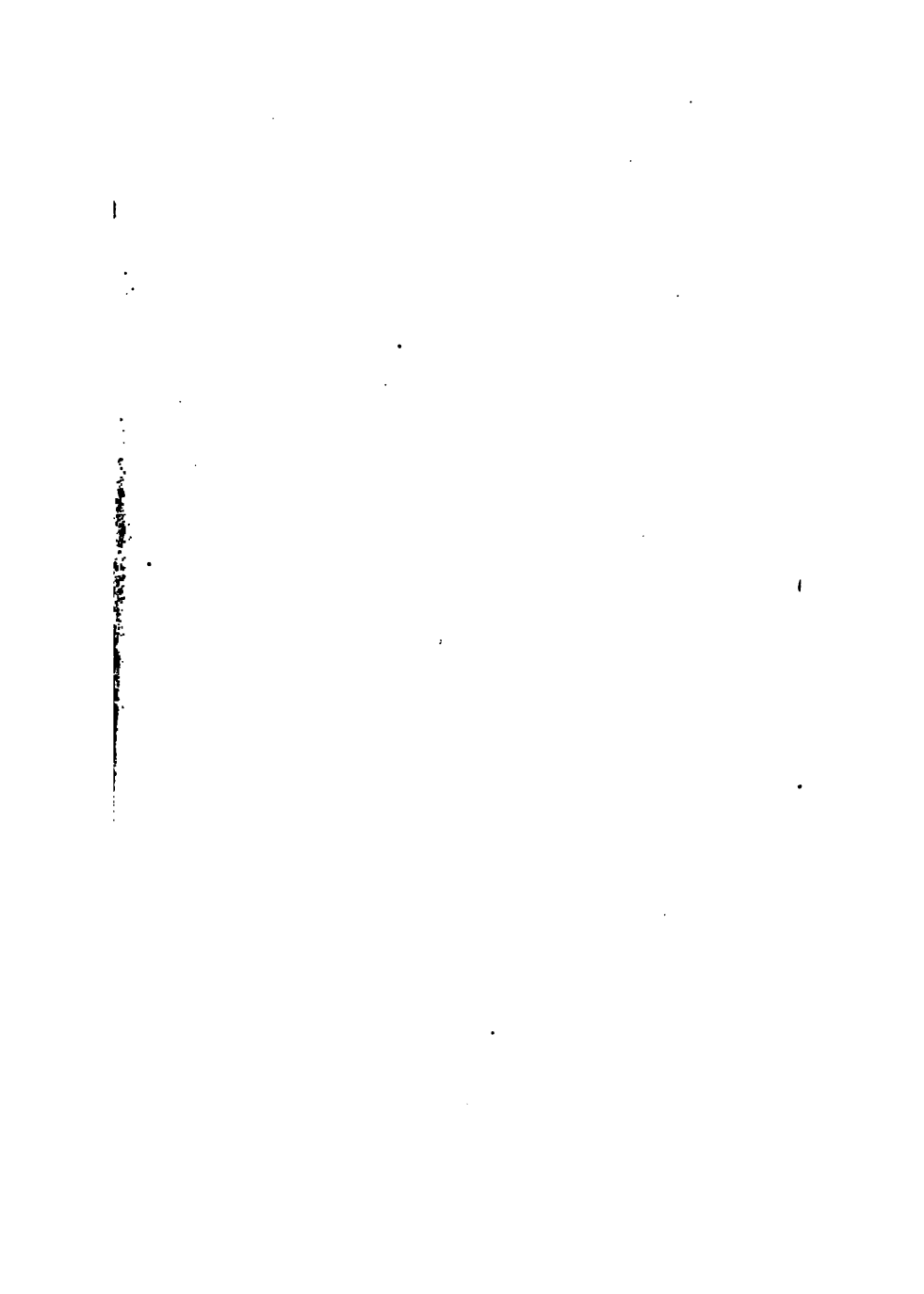


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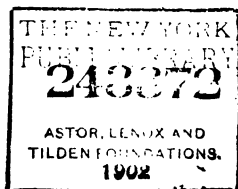
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THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.

CHAPTER I.

A DULL November afternoon was lowering over the wild open country and unsheltered coast-line of a southern shire nearly a hundred and sixty years ago. Long stretches of flat corn-fields, rich in the evidence of man's work and Nature's bounty, *now* beautify what were then wild marshy sands, with a melancholy growth of dull green bent toward the sea, and a sprinkling heather and wild flowers nearer terra-firma. At one point the land rose suddenly into a huge shapeless promontory—rugged, rocky, precipitous toward the sea ; but rounded and covered with thick green sward on the inner side.

Behind the shelter of this promontory lay the only bit of woodland for miles around. It nestled in a sort of semicircular valley, and crept round the base of the promontory to the west, where it grew, safe from nor' and sou' easters, with some luxuriance.

A small river took its course from the upper downs through this wood, widened as it approached the foot of the promontory, by the daily action of the tide. At low-water you might safely ride across the sandy embouchure to a wild lonely park, sparsely dotted with trees and sloping gently upwards to where it met the last straggling outposts of the wood, and was crowned by a gray, weatherbeaten, melancholy pile known locally as "The Priory," more accurately as Langdale Priory. It had been long in the hands of mere caretakers, for its last lord was on the losing side in the game of politics, and

had been an exile for some years before his death ; while the man, who, under the Government, administered the estate, John Langley (half-brother on the left-hand of the late lord), only paid rare and unavoidable visits to the deserted residence. Just now unwonted smoke-wreaths rose from one or two of the chimneys, for the present master had, a couple of months before, brought thither a lady—a young lady—and her maid or female attendant, respecting whom the few neighbors had had much talk. She was, they said, Langley's ward, the late lord's daughter ; and since her coming—although the Priory, instead of being, as now, within little over a couple of hours by train from the Metropolis, was at the end of a toilsome, not to say dangerous, journey—John Langley had visited it more than once, and was, with his son, at the opening of this tale again an inmate of its somber walls.

In the middle of the valley above mentioned clustered the little rambling village which had, as usual in early times, gathered in the fostering neighborhood of those "monks of old" to whom we owe so much, and bore the same name as the Priory, by the dependants of which it was originally peopled. Its present rude lounging population—half husbandmen, half smugglers—possessed more wealth and comfort than the inhabitants of similar villages further inland. They were a slow surly race, and constantly found time to saunter up the Head, as it was familiarly termed, with battered glasses under their arms, to look out in a seemingly purposeless manner.

This heavy November day then was glooming over the village green, on the edge of which stood the village inn—a low wide-spreading edifice of timber and rubble, with an irregular-tiled roof and narrow casements, a large and very dirty stable-yard at one side, and in front a superb spreading oak, on a branch of which hung the sign, a "Crown and Scepter."

A convenient bench surrounded the tree, and on it sat two stout elderly men, one of whom wore a white apron ; before them, holding a tray on which was a foaming jug of *home-brewed* and a couple of horns, stood a buxom,

red-checked, black-eyed woman in a gay chintz dress drawn through the pocket-holes over a gray woolen petticoat, while her hair was hidden under a high-crowned white linen cap, tied round with a red ribbon.

These were mine host and hostess, with their neighbor, a farmer and owner of the village forge.

"Come, neighbor," said Mistress Merrick, the hostess, "another horn of malt, 'tis as warm and thirsty a day as though it were June."

"Ay, thirstier," added her husband; "and how my young sir from the Priory could have sat nigh a full hour in the sanded parlor without so much as a cup of claret passes me."

"How?" asked the blacksmith, with open-mouthed curiosity. "Hast thee th' young Captain in there?" with a backward motion of his thumb.

"Ay, that we have," cried the hostess, "and a rare fine gentleman he is, with his long fair hair all over powder, and such a sword by his side, not like old Pike-man's cutlash, but long and thin like a big skewer. Eh! you could smell him right down the passage and oop the stair for sweet essences! and a right scornful gentleman—ain't he, master?"

"Ay, he is," returned Merrick, who was diligently filling his pipe. "No matter; I remember his grandmother, and she would have done better to have married my uncle fair and honest than turn to what she did."

"I've heerd tell as how th' ould lord was nigh marry-ing of her," said the blacksmith.

"He was so; my uncle used to tell that the day was fixed and the ring ready, when Captain Rupert, the ould lord's sailor brother (him as quit the country years and years ago), came back from sea, raging against such madness," continued Merrick, after sundry breaks to draw his pipe; "and so, you see, the upshot was Master John Langley was born out o' wedlock, and his brother, our late noble lord, was his master."

"Master Langley and the young Captain have been nigh ten days at the Priory this turn," put in the hostess. "Ah! 'tis sad to see the old place deserted like, and the

young lady, my lord's only daughter, shut up as if she were in prison."

"Hush, dame," said her husband. "What is that to us?"

"But what has brought the Captain here?" asked the blacksmith.

"Well, it's a queer business," said Merrick, puffing as he spoke. "You know that schooner that has been cruising backard and forrard? Our folks call her the strange sail. The crew has been in and out our place a bit—honest open-handed chaps as you'd wish to see—talking an odd sort of lingo."

"What sort be they?" asked the blacksmith in a confidential tone.

"How should I know? They takes their liquor and pays for it; that's all I have to see to."

"Never mind, neighbor," interrupted Mistress Merrick. "The master may be close if he chooses; but I never see a craft like that with a grand lady aboard before."

"Hush, hush, wife!" said her husband cautiously.

"Pooh!" she returned. "I am not going to say more than will be the talk of the whole village. Late last night a grand lady came up with that funny man as gave master the rum you liked so much—a queer fellow with ringlets and earrings—my word, but she was a fine big woman! I never was so took aback as when Gusuppy, as they call him, said she wanted a room for the night. Anyway, we got one ready, and she was no ways hard to please. Early this morning she had the master up (which I wonder she did not ask for me), and asked for a messenger immediate, to take a note oop to the Captain—to the Priory. Sure enough, oop he rode, over an hour and a half ago, at hot speed; and this his wedding-day! You know, he is to wed my lord's daughter this afternoon. Now 'tis past three, and there he sits, still waiting for the lady. She went out to take the air just before he came, and has never come back. There's a strange tale for you! She is a foreigner, the lady is, for little Gusuppy had to tell her every word we said in some queer tongue—he is gone *with her*." Mistress Merrick paused, out of breath.

The blacksmith listened, open-mouthed, while the host smoked in placid silence. The former now broke into exclamations, and slapping his huge brown hand energetically on his knee, cried :

“How d’ye know ’tis not the Chevalier himself?”

“Too big,” returned the host sententiously; “and, neighbor Hartley, you needn’t halloo as if you were hailing a boat.”

It may be here mentioned that this wild and lonely coast was a favorite landing-place for smugglers and Jacobite emissaries, and that the population was rather disaffected, though in a sleepy indifferent fashion, to the House of Hanover, now feeling a trifle more secure in its new place after the recent fruitless attempt of Mar in the Pretender’s cause.

Further conjecture was, however, stopped by the appearance, in the doorway of the inn, of an apparition unusual in that part of the country—viz., a fine gentleman. He was a tall slight man, dressed in a suit of fine blue cloth, laced with silver and decorated with silver filigree buttons. His own long fair hair, powdered and perfumed, lay upon his shoulders, crowned by a three-cornered hat, silver-laced and fringed with white feathers. His air and style was that of an exquisite of the period in a species of *demi-toilette*, if such an expression can be applied to male attire. Plain as was the suit, it was all in perfect keeping, from the silver-laced hat to the silver-edged cream-colored gloves and silver-hilted rapier, save that his high riding-boots were scarce in keeping with so much daintiness.

At sight of him, Merrick and the blacksmith rose, and the hostess laid her tray on the bench, the better to bob a curtsy. The gentleman held a large watch in his hand, on which he looked with an expression of cold displeasure in his handsome but contracted face; then turning his pale-blue scornful eyes on the group opposite, said in slow discontented tones, “My horse at once—I can stay no longer. Tell the lady, if she returns, I shall be in London before the week is out. Now then my horse.”

“Ay, sir. I’ll warrant I’ll hasten them,” returned

Merrick, laying down his pipe, and walking toward the stables more speedily than could have been expected from his size, shouting, "Halloo!—Joe, Nick, the Captain's horse! Look alive, you lubbers! his honor is waiting." Calling out as he went, he disappeared into the yard, while Captain Langley stood reading a small note, looking at it on every side, as though not quite sure of the writing; then tearing it into the smallest fragments with sudden impatience, he scattered them in the heavy air, shouting as he did so:

"What keeps those fellows with my horse? Am I to wait all day, you infernal lazy—" He stopped short, for Merrick reappeared in a state of great excitement. He held Joe—a youth in shirt-sleeves, with a shock head—by the collar, and with his disengaged hand seemed to pommel him severely, while the victim cried for mercy; two other young men in rough attire followed, gesticulating and shouting.

"You careless good-for-nothing scamps," cried Merrick, letting go the first sufferer to seize another, "to go for to lose his honor's horse! How dare you take your eyes off him?"

"What, what!" cried Captain Langley, springing forward. "What's this!—my horse lost?"

"Ay, sir! Somehow these varmints have let him slip his halter, and he has run off. I'll flog the life out of you—I'll—" But the Captain here drew forth the riding-whip, which he held under his arm, and cut viciously right and left with a concentrated fury, very different from the host's noisy demonstration.

"I have no time to punish the dogs now," exclaimed young Langley. "Come, saddle the best hack you have got in that beastly pigsty. By — I'll make you pay for this day's work!"

"But, good sir, worshipful sir!" cried the hostess in visible trepidation, "we have ne'er a steed in the stable. Master's own bay mare is gone with his Reverence Parson Everard two hours ago. He was sore pressed to ride to Hythe, for Lord Dornton lies a-dying, and sent this *morning* at speed for the parson."

"How?" asked Langley, stepping back as if stunned. "The parson ridden away to Hythe! There is something wrong here! How did my horse get loose?" he continued in a high-pitched voice, his face again darkening; whereupon several loud voices in disjointed exclamations explained how "the halter was a bit rotten," and "his honor would have his beast tied in the yard, not put in the stable"—"so, when th' ould donkey brayed sudden like—"

"I suppose the brute has made his way home," interrupted Captain Langley, "and I must follow on foot; but," with a deep imprecation, "you shall suffer for it."

"Shall I send to the Priory for a horse, your honor?"

"Send to —," retorted the fine gentleman fiercely; "I will get there sooner on foot! And hark'ee, master, it's like enough there's some devilish scheme under all this—if so, look to yourself." So saying, and again striking the man nearest him with his riding-whip, he walked quickly away a few paces, then paused, and turning, requested in less angry tones to be informed if the first path to the left, after leaving the village, did not lead by a shorter way into the park.

"Ay, sir," answered Merrick, "after you pass the bridge. You couldn't cross the sands now, even on horseback; the tide is at the full."

"Ay, sir, about half a mile past my forge," said the blacksmith, "and I'll show—" But his further utterance was checked by a sudden backward step on the part of Merrick, which brought the full weight of that ponderous person on his tenderest toe.

While the blacksmith held his foot, uttering strong expressions of agony, Captain Harold Langley, of His Majesty's Foot Guards, marched off at a rapid pace—away—down the straggling High Street, where the children gazed wonderingly, and the dogs barked angrily at him. Once he stopped at the forge aforesaid, attracted by a rough stout pony tethered there while the smith shod an old gray mare. The owner of both, however, a rugged red-headed countryman, stupid, but not uncivil, wanted his cattle for himself, and could not be tempted

to part with either, even for half an hour. So with many a muttered curse Harold Langley strode on. Now he glanced at his huge gold repeater; now at the fast darkening sky. It was past three o'clock, and the hour fixed for the ceremony of his marriage, if so unceremonious an affair could be so termed.

Not that Harold Langley was an impatient bridegroom. No; a wife, according to the fine gentleman theory, was "a mill-stone about the neck," even though buoyed by rank and wealth; but in the present instance the bride had neither: she was daughter of an exiled despoiled malcontent, what was there to gain from such an alliance? Harold could not fathom his father's motives for so peremptorily desiring the marriage. However, as it was only by consenting to it that he could get his debts paid, Captain Langley consented.

"And she is such a strange little chit," he thought; "needs me no more than if I were a boor! and yet she has had some cultivation too in the French capital, and does not seem altogether without wit! Well, I will take the conceit out of her by-and-by." Wherein the gallant guardsman reckoned without his host. The conceit was never taken out of a woman by a man she does not love. The power to humble and to crush is vested in the hands of him who holds her heart; and he is seldom averse to exercise it.

While Harold Langley meditated and cursed the mischance which occasioned his long walk, his ill luck at play, his father, his bride elect, and the fair dame whose billet of that morning had led to his present position, he advanced at good speed, having left all signs of habitation behind. He now approached the little river before mentioned, just where its steep shrubby banks opened to its embouchure.

"Directly she is my wife I will quit this infernal den, and never return," was his mental resolution as he passed the first outlying clump of trees and underwood; and as he emerged from its shelter up rose behind him, from the thicket, three figures—three strange-looking men in sailor garb, with gold earrings, and silk sashes of bright colors and foreign texture. The first—a short, powerful,

broad-shouldered man—held a mass of drapery on his left arm ; with a silent stealthy tread he darted after the fine gentleman who had just passed, and with one cast of the voluminous cloak he carried enveloped him from head to foot.

In vain the victim struggled and strove to cry out. Thick entangling folds of cloth prevented either effort ; and the two other desperadoes were quickly at hand to aid their leader. Yet no very desperate motive seemed to prompt their action. Their bronzed hard countenances wore an expression of broad amusement, and they called to each other in a strange mixed dialect, in which even a few English words were heard. “Your Excellency had better keep quiet,” said the leader at last, as their prisoner made a sudden furious effort. “No harm is meant, so be quiet, Caramba ! I did not think there was so much force in so slim a chap ! Here, Nick, Antonio, take his feet ; leave his head to me : I am equal to the two of you any day ! Now bear a hand !—gently—all right ! Excellency, don’t take so out of yourself ! Steady oh !”

Slowly the group approached the edge of the road where a footpath among the fern and brushwood led to the water’s edge. Very carefully they lifted their burden over the rugged path, the leader loosening the cloak which wrapped their prisoner to admit air, informing him he might make as much noise as he liked, it would avail him nothing ; and so, though moving slowly, they were soon out of sight—silence settling down once more over the peaceful beauty of the scene.

CHAPTER II.

LATER in the evening of the same day a middle-sized, middle-aged, square-set man, dressed with studious simplicity in a suit of black cloth relieved by cut-steel buttons, in black-silk stockings, with cut-steel shoe and knee buckles, the sole indication of costliness,

his lace ruffles and cravat, stood, his hands crossed behind him, in the recess of one of three windows which lighted a large room, known to the dwellers in Langdale Priory as the "little dining-room," to distinguish it from a wide banquetting hall on which it opened.

The outlook was not inspiring. The dull daylight had almost faded, and the tide had receded sufficiently to leave bare in their unsightliness masses of wet seaweed, black and desolate-looking. The room itself looked desolate, an island of carpet broke the surface of polished oak near the fireplace, where the remains of a wood fire glowed sullenly. A heavy oaken table, a few high-backed chairs, and a large carved settle with a red cushion made up the furniture, in addition to a worm-eaten buffet at one side of the projecting fireplace.

The gentleman just described turned and paced the room, evidently in deep and uneasy thought. More than once he consulted his watch, frowning portentously as he did so. At length he approached the table and laid his hand upon a bell which stood there. As he did so, a puritanical-looking man, in sad-colored garments and hair cropped sullenly straight across his brow, entered, and advancing deliberately to the table with a short bow, or rather nod of the head, said in a harsh voice :

"The clergyman has come."

"Indeed ! whom have they got ?" asked the other, who, it is scarce necessary to say, was Mr. John Langley.

"A gentleman from Thirlsmere, nigh eight miles off. He is somewhat shook with hard riding—shall I offer him a cup of ale ?"

"Wine, my good Simon, wine," returned Mr. Langley ; "and, Simon, it is strange my son has not yet returned. Send instantly to the inn—recall him ; some of our messengers have surely now come back, and the tide is low enough to cross the sands—half an hour will bring him here. Meantime I will go speak with my niece. She must have well-nigh exhausted her patience ; it is full two hours past the time appointed. I must explain matters to her myself."

Simon, Langley's local factotum, withdrew, and his

master, or employer, paused uneasily, his hand resting on the table. "That mad boy," he thought, "to be drawn aside from so important an affair by a billet from some courtesan—some painted bit of villany. Why will he not be guided by me! Why does he not see things as I do! With my brains and his manners what might we not accomplish? He is a fine lad, but a thoughtless." The father's grim square-jawed face relaxed as he thought of the son, round whom his all of human love was entwined.

As he thought, the door opened and two female figures entered, apparently to Mr. Langley's surprise. The elder was a tall gaunt woman, not old, but quite past youth, with a quantity of rough gray hair, over which was tied a cap of thick white lace, which yet produced little effect toward softening her rugged face, with its wide mouth and sharp gray eyes. Her dress of lavender silk was looped up over a petticoat of some dark stuff, and her sinewy spare arms were covered with black lace mittens to where the ruffles of her sleeves met them. On one of these strong arms leant a creature so widely different in aspect that, cold and unimpressible as he was, John Langley paused a moment in silence, struck by the contrast, as they approached.

A fair girl in earliest womanhood—a delicate highbred-looking woman, whose every movement suggested perfection of form, rather below middle height, her profuse nut-brown hair turned over a cushion in the regal fashion of the times, adding to her height. Her somewhat pallid face, wide across the brow and tapering to the delicate chin, was lighted by a pair of blue eyes so fringed with long dark lashes that their color was not easily discernible; her rosy mouth was perhaps larger than it ought to be for the strict rule of beauty, but so soft, so sensitively expressive, none could wish it altered; while a *nez retroussé* saved the face from over sweetness. She was clad in a long robe of white silk, the square-cut lace-edged corsage of which was ornamented with rosettes of violet and silver, and wrapping herself shivering in a large white-lace shawl or veil which partly covered her head. As she

clung to her companion a fairer picture of a mother's or a lover's delicate darling could scarce be seen.

Not such, however, she seemed to the small, dark, restless eyes that gazed at her from under John Langley's heavy brows. The deer-like carriage of her head, the indescribable nobility of her air were insults to him; her whole bearing and aspect a silent protest on the side of that legitimacy which, according to his crooked theory, robbed him of his rights. For was not he her father's eldest brother—the rightful heir of the Langdale Lands but for the leaving undone of a small ceremony, which his parents had omitted? This deadly sense of wrong, this poison of envy, had warped him from boyhood.

Not all the frank friendliness and active kindness of Reginald, the late lord, who had died in exile scarce a year previously, could soften his heart or relax the determination which gradually formed itself in his mind to possess himself of the heritage of Langdale. The open-hearted Lord Langdale had little dreamed of this; he looked on John as his mentor, his right hand. Nevertheless John's influence never kept him out of certain mischiefs—amongst them political plots, about which the good Baron cared little, though his unguarded participation in them led to his compulsory flight. Through all Lord Langdale believed in his brother, and to his care he bequeathed his only child, Maud, who now stopped opposite her uncle.

“My fair niece,” said he, taking her hand, and carefully softening his tones, “I grieve to tell you that your favorite parson, Everard, cannot attend you to-day—you must e'en allow a stranger to tie the knot. An early patron and fast friend of the Rector lies on his deathbed, and sent craving the last consolations of religion from our good parson, who was compelled to obey the summons. Meantime my son, devoured with impatience, sent messengers in some directions, and rode forth himself to seek another clergyman, lest our plans should be defeated. The messenger has returned with a reverend gentleman, but my son, not knowing the country, has *probably* missed his way, for he has not yet returned.”

"And Parson Everard cannot come! I am so sorry!" said the young lady, whose pleasant voice had a slightly foreign accent, while her eyes filled with tears. "He has ever been so kind to me! Why did you send for a stranger? A day sooner or a day later would make no difference."

"My dear young lady, to you perhaps; but you must make allowance for a lover's impatience."

To which Mistress Maud replied by a sweet saucy laugh, though her cheeks were pale and her lashes wet. "Harold a lover! Harold impatient! Ah, good uncle, you are a droll." The young lady often made use of French expressions.

"Madam," returned Langley, frowning, "your mirth is unbecoming."

"*N'importe*," she rejoined. "Am I not going to fulfill my promise, and wed your son? Will you not fulfill yours, and take me from this weary dreary place? I daresay we shall do well enough as man and wife. My poor dear father loved me so much. Surely, when he is used to me, Harold will love me a little;" and turning her face quickly against the arm of her attendant, who had stood motionless while her young mistress spoke, she burst into tears. "There, uncle," she said, brokenly yet defiantly; "there! which like you best—my laughter or my weeping?"

"My young lady has been whimsical all day," said the gaunt woman in a rough *staccato* voice, "and faint like, which is but natural. A cup of mulled claret now."

Mr. Langley rang the bell which lay on the table with half-suppressed impatience; but while he rang it Simon re-entered, and announced that Captain Langley had arrived, and that he with the reverend gentleman were even now waiting the bride in the chapel.

"It is well!" cried Langley, greatly relieved. "Come, dear niece, let me lead you to what will be the securing of your comfort for life."

Maud, her bosom still heaving with sobs, and deadly pale, silently gave her hand.

"Stay close to me, Dorothy, dear Dorothy," she whis-

pered to her grim attendant, whereat that individual nodded a sharp emphatic nod, and the trio left the dining-room.

Crossing the large hall, they entered the deserted chapel, which opened from it. Here had been lavished a wealth of decorations in the old monkish days, now neglected and dilapidated. A paltry cloth covered the communion-table, where once was the high altar. The darkness of the chapel was rendered painfully visible by the pale luster of a pair of huge wax-tapers placed upon the table; their light fell upon the clergyman in a crumpled surplice, and on the long fair hair and blue and silver suit of Captain Langley, who had placed himself on one of the stone recess seats to the left of the altar. He rested his right elbow on his knee, and his head on his hand, as if lost in thought or absorbed in prayer, nor did he move till his bride came in a line with him, when he rose and took his place beside her. John Langley fell back a step, while Dorothy pressed close. Simon Evans, the caretaker, Mistress Margery, the housekeeper, old Nicholas, the general factotum, grouped themselves a few paces off; while the lower servants, a reduced retinue, crowded as near as they might. Then the clergyman, a young, healthy, rosy-faced man, opened the book, and began in a hasty monotonous manner to read the solemn touching service.

The bridegroom's responses were uttered in a deep undertone, which the echoes of the chapel blurred and rendered inarticulate; while the bride's were inaudible, even to her faithful Dorothy. At the passage where the ring is put on, the bridegroom drew from his own finger, and placed upon the bride's, one of a rich yellow color and of extreme thickness. Dorothy at this point thought she perceived a certain failing about her young lady, as though she would have fallen. The same idea seemed to suggest itself to the bridegroom, who passed his arm round her, and so held her up till the last word was spoken. Almost before the sound of the parson's voice ceased, the little head drooped forward, and Maud lay *insensible* against her new-made husband's breast.

"She is quite gone!" cried Dorothy.

"Way there!" said the bridegroom in his deep undertone, and raising her in his arms he carried the slight form swiftly through the onlookers, bending his head down to gaze into her face.

By the time Mr. Langley and Dorothy reached the dining-room, now almost in darkness, he was supporting his bride by one of the windows, which he had managed to throw open, and still bending with an air of tenderness over her.

"The dear lamb! is she coming to?" exclaimed Dorothy as she approached. Maud replied by languidly stretching out her arms to her attendant.

The bridegroom immediately resigned the fair pliant form to the waiting-woman, slipping something into her hand at the same time, and muttering in her ear, "Guard your mistress well," drew away to make room for Mr. Langley, who now pressed forward with inquiries for his daughter-in-law.

With unwonted care he inspected her removal to her own room. Here Mistress Dorothy laid her on her bed, insisting on Mr. Langley and Dame Margery leaving the room, ordered perfect quiet, and took her station by the bedside.

A short space of complete silence ensued. Then, to Dorothy's great surprise, a whisper, low but distinct, came from her young lady's tremulous lips: "Dorothy, are we quite alone—quite safe?"

"Yes, my precious lamb!"

"Then, Dorothy," continued Maud, raising herself upon her elbow, "Harold has sent some one to take his place. I am not married to my uncle's son, but to some stranger."

"God bless you, my dear! You lie down and sleep. Do not excite yourself: you will find it all right when you wake."

"No, Dorothy, I am not wandering. I tell you," Maud spoke slowly and with solemnity, "I never saw yonder gentleman before. I too thought it was Harold till he took my hand to put on this ring. Then something in his touch was so unlike Harold's; I looked up

and saw a pair of brown eyes, and a look in them something like my father's, only sterner. My heart leaped, and then stood still. I scarce remember anything more until I was by the open window, and as you came up he whispered, 'Keep faith with me till I can claim you or release you.'"

"Dear heart!" cried the bewildered Dorothy, "what a tale is this. We know not what desperado may have murdered the Captain, and put on his clothes. Great powers! Why did you not cry aloud, or do something? It is a terrible business!"

"Dorothy," returned the young girl wearily, "I was so sick at heart to-day—so mad at my own weakness in consenting to wed Harold—so shamed at my own cowardice in fearing to break from that consent, that I rejoiced to feel the touch of another's hand; and then, when recovering, I feared to cry out, lest they would not let the gentleman get forth with life; for I have read that in John Langley's eyes I mortally fear. But, Dorothy, it is terrible!" she added, shuddering. "I am wedded to I know not who! Any wretch might claim me, for I would scarce know yonder gentleman again. But see," she continued, blushing and smiling, "he has taken my breastknot," pointing to a vacant place in the front of her dress, whence an ornament had been somewhat roughly unfastened. "Nevertheless I am terrified," resumed the young orphan. "Stay by me; never leave me, Dorothy, dear Dorothy! my only friend."

"Ay will I, while I have life!" cried Dorothy, grasping her rough hair with both hands in her distress. "Why am I standing here when the country ought to be scoured to find the poor young Captain or his remains?" and disregarding her mistress's entreaties not to be left alone, she rushed hastily out of the room.

Meantime Mr. Langley returned to the dining-room, intending to discuss with Harold the question of their journey to town and certain future arrangements.

He found that apartment looking considerably brighter than when he had left it. A good fire had been made up, *and candles were lighting on the table, which was spread*

for the evening meal ; but no Harold awaited him. He summoned the butler, as old Nicholas considered himself, and desired Captain Langley should be told he wished to speak with him.

"The Captain has just ridden forth, sir."

"How? Ridden forth? Impossible!"

"'Tis true, your honor. Directly Madam Langley was carried to her chamber, the Captain went straight to the stables, mounted (for the men were all agog with the wedding, and had not unsaddled his horse), and rode away."

"Rode away!" echoed Langley, utterly confounded. Here was an amount of contumacious indifference for which he was wholly unprepared. What could it mean? "Send Simon Evans to me," he said, after a few moments' perplexed thought; "and let one of the stable-boys mount, and be ready to carry a message directly."

Evans quickly obeyed his master's summons, and confirmed the butler's startling intelligence; but Langley had hardly begun to utter his suspicion that the recreant bridegroom had been again lured to the village inn, when the door was flung violently open, and Dorothy entered, her whole aspect showing utter dismay.

"Sir! sir! it was not the Captain! It was another man altogether! And you had better raise the country, for it is my belief your son has been ill-dealt by."

"Woman, are you mad too?" said Langley, with fierce impatience.

"Hear me," she returned, and then plunged into a short repetition of Maud's story.

"Your mistress is raving—she wanders," said Mr. Langley when she ceased. "A stranger pass himself on *me* as my own son! Impossible!"

"It is a strange tale," observed Evans dryly. "Pity it is that Captain Langley took himself away."

"Send to that accursed inn," cried Langley, infuriated out of his usual puritanical precision. "He is lurking there no doubt; and send also towards Hythe, and all round the country. Dead or alive, I will have him back;" but Langley shivered slightly as he spoke. Sneer as he

would at the improbability of Dorothy's tale, he could not resist the dim horror that began to gnaw his heart.

So the grooms mounted and rode in all directions, the young clergyman proving a valuable assistant ; but the night passed over, and morning came, and noon also, but no Harold. It was a period of intense anguish to the grim self-controlled father ; that any other than Harold had stood at the altar was an idea he could not entertain. Who but Harold had that long fair hair so peculiarly worn ? And then the dress, the horse—both were Harold's. About this absurd whim of Maud's he did not trouble himself ; but his son's unaccountable absence, *that* was a tangible terror. Now noon had again come round, the country for miles had been searched in vain, and a painful pause ensued.

Langley was debating with himself what was next to be done, his hopes dying out, his stern compressed nature refusing to succumb, when the clatter of horses' hoofs from the court-yard struck his ear, then a confused murmur of voices ; next the door of Mr. Langley's private room opened, and Harold himself burst in.

Harold alive, and seemingly well, but disordered by hard riding, his face dark with anger.

CHAPTER III.

AT the sight of his son, safe and sound, grief and anxiety gave way in John Langley's mind to supreme indignation.

"Harold," he exclaimed in an angry voice, "what's this ? How dare you so insult your bride and me ?"

"Give me some wine," cried Harold, throwing aside his hat with a furious gesture. "I have been hoaxed and bedeviled, and 'fore Heaven I must have blood before I am satisfied ! There is some hellish plot on foot ! *Where are the magistrates, and those wretched bumpkins*

who pretend to keep the peace, and let pirates prow about at their pleasure?"

"Harold, I cannot understand you. How can you explain your absence at such a time?"

Whereupon, with many oaths and ejaculations, Harold recapitulated his misfortunes at the village, making no secret of the motive that lured him thither. About half-way back he was, he said, set on by a large party of ruffians, who muffled him in a cloak, carried him some way, and then, in a lonely rift of the rocks at the foot of the Head, compelled him (by a pistol held to his ear) to strip himself of his outer garments. He was then again muffled up, placed in a boat, rowed some distance, and hoisted up the side of a ship. "Here," continued Harold, "I was set free in a small richly-furnished cabin, where they gave me an excellent supper and wonderfully fine wine, and treated me well. This morning they brought me my own clothes again, the coat strained and spoilt, as if some broad-shouldered brute had been forcing himself into it. I was blindfolded, put into a boat, and rowed a good way. Again I was lifted out, carried a few paces, and then ordered to stand still, on pain of having my brains blown out. I waited patiently for what seemed a long time, when the dead silence was broken by the whinnying of a horse close by. I tore off the bandages, found myself quite alone, and the bay mare tethered beside me. Of course I mounted, and finding I was somewhere at the other side of the village, rode here as fast as I could. Now send for the parson, and let me make amends to the fair Maud for—"

An exclamation from his father interrupted him.

"Harold, she is married! Married to some one in your clothes, with your hair, Harold. There is more mischief under this than at first sight seems. But, come now, has not this been some drunken dream? Confess you have been drinking deep."

"Nonsense, sir!" returned the young man; "I might put the same question to you. How is it that any one could persuade you into believing him your son?"

"Listen to me," returned Langley, and proceeded to re-

count the occurrences of the previous evening ; whereupon Harold's fury subsided into astonishment.

"There must be some infernal plot brewing somewhere ! What's your idea of the matter, sir ? "

Mr. Langley did not answer immediately. He sat down beside his open bureau, and, placing his elbows on it, leaned his face upon his hands. Harold, looking to his father to help him out of a difficulty, kept a respectful silence—respectful only under such circumstances. At last Mr. Langley raised his head, looking dark and stern, and speaking as if to himself, observed :

"The existence of that pardon is known to more than I thought."

"How ? What pardon ? " asked the son, drawing a chair opposite and gazing eagerly at his parent.

Whereupon, with many injunctions to keep the explanation strictly secret, Langley proceeded :

"When Lord Langdale had been nearly nine years banished, many friends of his—for he had them on both sides—exerted themselves to procure a remission of his disabilities, especially St. John, who never quite broke with St. Germain's ; and it was this leniency which permitted me so long to manage this estate, much of the revenues of which went both to friends and foes ; comparatively little falling to my share, I can assure you. However, it was generally believed that the late queen died without granting the pardon sought for by Lord Langdale's friends. Now I believe she did—Langdale so informed me ; if so, it must have been one of her last acts. But the document has never appeared. Lord Langdale died somewhat suddenly, St. John is in his turn an exile, and the only trace of the pardon that has come to my knowledge was through a rascally dismissed clerk from Harley's office—a drunken fellow, who wanted to extract money from me, declaring he had possessed himself of the missing pardon. I cannot think how this scoundrel got hold of it, *if* he had ; for on my refusing to give him attention till I saw the document and held it in my hand, he promised to bring it next day. He came *in the evening* certes, but in sorry plight, with a broken

head and quite beside himself. Some one, he said, had knocked him down senseless, and robbed him of the precious parchment. Nay, I believe him. No man could have merely *acted* such part. Moreover his head was sore hurt. Since then I have striven in many ways to gain intelligence, but have never succeeded in obtaining the smallest clue."

"This is a strange history," said Harold, as his father paused. "Why did you never tell me these particulars before?"

"Because, young sir, you are not over fond of listening to my words, nor of keeping your own counsel from your boon companions. How was it you were so weak, so senseless, as to be lured by a billet from some courtesan to—"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Harold, with his finest air; "it was a lady of fashion and reputation who so far honored me with her confidence. I had already made some way in her good graces when your inexorable cruelty carried me into these rude regions; and you can imagine my delight at receiving a mysterious billet, purporting to be from the divine creature."

"The divine creature is, I fancy, not sparing of her favors, or your plotters could not have known how to bait their trap so cunningly," returned Langley sneeringly. "She was well worth risking the loss of this goodly heritage."

"Then why, sir, not confide this tale to me before? I should have been more circumspect."

"I doubt it, Harold. Moreover it was not necessary. By this marriage the lands of Langdale were secured to you if the pardon is ever discovered. They would be yours in right of your wife, by the fiction of the law, as well as the reality of primogeniture which ought to be *mine*. You would never know the galling sense of wrong and humiliation as I have done—to feel my younger brother lord it over me; to be compelled to lick the hand that flung me obligations."

Langley paused, suddenly checking the bitter words that rose to his lips. It was seldom so much of the inner

fire showed itself above the calm of his exterior; and Harold felt proportionally impressed.

"Why," said he, elevating his arched eyebrows, "I thought the Baron and yourself were dear friends. Have I not seen his letters? He must have been a most unsophisticated rustic! How was it he loved you so much?"

"I was useful to him. I have ever found it wiser to loosen the stones in a wall than to run my head against it! Then he always prated of our being the last of a long line. But Lord Langdale was a fool! He stuck to a failing cause, and was obliged to fly. Died and left his only child to my care. Ay! and she is of the same sort—brimful of a careless pride that flings favors as you do bones to curs. I can read the haughty curve of her soft-looking lips aright. Distrust of us lurks in her heart. She must feel she is a beggar, dependent upon my bounty. She ought to be at my feet in gratitude for the marriage I have planned for her; and yet she bears herself like a queen! Why, Harold, she *knew* you were not the man to whom she vowed herself yesterday; and yet she let him escape. My son, *she* shall not escape us!"

"This is a pleasant view of one's future wife!" said Harold, shrugging his shoulders. "Think you she knew the fellow?"

Langley thought a moment. "No!" he said. "The dismay of that unmanageable hag Dorothy proved that. She and Madam Maud are one. No!"

"At any rate, sir, we are checkmated for the present."

"Not so. This idle talk is breath wasted. Who repented you yesterday? that is the question. I believe him to be some adventurer who has got hold of the pardon and wishes to entitle himself to this noble estate. But no! There is many a barrier to be surmounted yet, Sir Stranger! Listen, Harold. We will make Parson Everard talk to Maud and persuade her to go through the ceremony with you. He is well aware how advantageous the marriage would be to his old friend's daughter—and therefore on our side. Then we will carry her away to London. I dare not trust her here, even were I able *to remain on guard myself*—so bold, so dexterous a vil-

Iain would carry her off under our very eyes ! Away, Harold ! dress yourself in your best attire. Go ! play the heart-broken lover—ply her well with flattery. Come, Harold—she is fair—a dainty piece of female flesh ! ”

“ True, sir ! ” said the fine gentleman, whose equanimity was somewhat restored ; “ but so refrigerated a morsel that it would require a real burning flame to warm her. And this I have been accustomed to see offered on my own shrine ! Besides, a helpless kidnapped lover is a somewhat ridiculous object. However,” he continued with an oath, “ I’ll do my best to frustrate the scoundrel that entrapped me. I marvel who he was ? some roystering desperado. But I must own I was not badly treated ; and ”—raising his arm till the sleeve touched his nose—“ the fellow has a fair taste in perfumes ! ”

Another day only added deeper shades to the mystery surrounding these strange occurrences. The parson made his appearance in a state of much bewilderment. On reaching the principal inn at Hythe, he found that, so far from lying there on his deathbed, my Lord Dorn-ton had not visited the town for more than six months, and was then supposed to be in the north.

The worthy clergyman and his steed were too weary to return the same night ; and when he did, it was but to add his vague conjecture to Langley’s, only, in his ignorance of Langley’s secret, they were still wider of the mark. It was, he thought, a wild hoax on the part of some of Harold’s boon companions ; and he earnestly, if a little prosily, entreated that young man to reform—to quit his wild courses now that he was about to enter into the holy estate of matrimony—to live “ cleanly and like a gentleman,” &c. &c.—advice for which Mr. Langley thanked him with laborious courtesy. But Langley’s courtesy became more difficult to maintain when he found that the parson backed up Maud in her decided refusal to go through the ceremony of marriage once more.

“ It would be making a mock of a sacred rite,” he said ; “ take open and decided steps to have the marriage already celebrated declared null and void, then your way

will be clear ; but do not so unjustly by your ward as to leave her a prey to dangerous claims."

Enraged as Langley was by these scruples, the feelings roused by them were nothing compared to the fury and hatred engendered by Maud's conduct. She had been—or, as Langley thought, pretended to be—unwell for several days, and unable to see any one save Dorothy. When at last she did appear, with pale cheeks, and heavy eyes, and lips that trembled nervously as she spoke, Harold felt a little moved to pity ; which, however, soon vanished. Though bodily weak, a new spirit seemed to have entered into her. In vain Harold pressed his suit. In vain Mr. Langley, giving way to her peremptory refusal to entertain even an idea of repeating the marriage, sought to draw from her a promise, that so soon as the first ceremony was legally set aside she would become Harold's wife.

"I know not how it is, uncle," she said in reply to some strong remonstrances of his one evening about a week after Harold's mischance, as she sat half reclining on the settle by the fire, which glowed and blazed, casting a strong light on her slender figure and black dress, and leaving Langley in shadow ; while Harold, ostentatiously performing the lover's part, sat on a low seat beside her. They were gathered in the dining-room, where she had reluctantly joined the father and son at their evening meal for the first time since her indisposition. "I know not how it is, but since I said, or heard, those solemn words before God's altar, I feel I cannot say them to Harold. No ! I cannot, I will not," she added, with languid decision. "Why do you urge me to be your wife, cousin ?" looking at him steadily ; "you do not care for me ! every fine speech you make tells me so ; and I do not fear to say I do not care for you. It will not hurt you ! You will find many a finer lady than I am ready to wed you—I cannot."

"What !" said Langley, with a coarse sneer. "Has your vagrant fancy been caught by the ruffian who personated my son ?"

"I have no fancies," she said sadly, yet with dignity.

"So far am I from entertaining any, that I pray you—I call upon you, as my guardian—to set me free from the terrible bond that links me to I know not whom."

"And so I will, my ward, if you promise to wed Harold the day that mock marriage is dissolved," returned Langley grimly.

"That I will not," cried Maud petulantly. "What am I? What is it that makes you thus persist?"

"Ay, what indeed!" said Langley in a low stern tone, while he rose and paced the room; "what, save a desire to benefit your father's daughter? Girl, do you know that you are a beggar, dependent on my bounty for the food you eat, and the clothes you wear; and because few men will wed a penniless helpless gentlewoman, I give you my son, who, out of chivalrous kindness to his kinswoman, consents to take you? Girl! you should in mere gratitude yield us both implicit obedience. What are you, insignificant isolated atom, that you dare to cross my will?"

Langley, feeling secure and unspeakably infuriated, let go for a moment the reins of his self-control.

"Hush, hush, father! 'tis too harsh," cried Harold, the instinct of good manner revolting against this brutality.

But Maud, with the imprudent daring of youth, rose from her seat and, confronting her guardian, said, with a tinge of contempt in her clear low voice:

"I thank you, Master Langley; but you need not cumber yourself with me. There are still those friends in France—from whom, against their will, you took me—I wish to go to them, if you are weary of returning to my father's daughter something of the benefits he bestowed—something of the generosity which even admitted your claim to brotherhood."

The moment the words had passed Maud's lips she felt that what she said had turned the scale, and transformed her guardian into a deadly implacable foe; yet she stood gallantly at bay, nor did her eye flinch from the encounter with Langley's, turned on her with a glance before which she might well quail.

"Well, madam, I thank you for your candor ; but it does not lessen my determination to benefit you." He paused a moment. "Two days hence we will start for town ; and there I shall take the measures necessary to dissolve one marriage and celebrate the other."

"Call my woman—call Dorothy," said the young lady, with an air of command, to Harold ; "and, gentlemen, I wish you both good-night."

With a haughty bow, she swept past Langley, her head erect and her step steady ; but when alone with Dorothy, in what agonies of tears she clung to her—how she sobbed with rage and fear !

"Can we not get away ? is there no escape ?"

And Dorothy, with tenderest sympathy and gruffest tones said :

"God help you, my lamb ! there's no escape for empty pockets."

While Langley, not a little startled, and vexed too, at his own momentary want of self-control, poured out a bumper of claret and draining it, said, with a constrained smile :

"A vixen ! but we will tame her—eh, boy ? Come, you cannot deny that there is fire beneath the snow !"

"Ay, sir ; but somewhat volcanic."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Countess of Helmsford sat at her toilette one foggy evening about the beginning of the year.

The Countess was a great lady—a beauty still—a wit—a politician—an institution of London life in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The dinners and card-parties of Lady Helmsford were heavens of fashion into which the outsiders strove for admission with far more of purpose and untiring application than they did to make their "calling and election sure." The Countess was nobly born, nobly wed, and early widowed. Tory by birth and early association—Whig by choice—through a certain cold clearness of intellect, which generally

guided her right, save when passion blinded her with the gold dust of delusion.

She was a large voluptuously-formed woman, with a pale olive complexion, and dusky shading of the upper lip quite un-English.

A stately commanding woman, formed by Nature for a great lady. And now she sat before her toilette-table gazing intently on her mirror, while with her own fair discriminating hand she fixed the quaintly-cut patches contained in a box held by an obsequious waiting-woman on the plump and delicately-rouged cheeks, which, one after the other, she turned to the light of the wax-tapers in the girandole.

"There, Beville, I need add no more. In truth, it is sad waste of labor and of time. There is no one in town worth dressing for, only worn-out old rakes and insipid young ones. Ah, Beville, there is not one, Whig or Tory, to compare with that splendid Spaniard who dazzled us all in Paris last autumn."

Lady Helmsford spoke to her maid with the sort of contemptuous confidence tyrants bestow on slaves they imagine too lowly to judge or to disapprove.

"Indeed, my lady, he was a proper man—and a generous. Why, none of the marquises or dukes who were courting your ladyship were half as open-handed. But I warrant he was a prince in his own country."

"That I cannot possibly answer for," returned the great lady, with a short laugh. "As like he was some bold wanderer from the Spanish main, though he was recognized by many of the Spanish grandees in Paris. No matter, Beville; there is a fire and manhood in these carvers of their own fortune that make them irresistible."

The Countess rose as she spoke, and slowly paced to and fro.

"He was a gentleman too," she went on, as if speaking to herself. "How strange his disappearance! Just when I had won him from that proud beautiful Marquise de Boisville. And she was younger—years younger than I am."

Again she seated herself before her glass, and gazed at

her own image intently. "Yes, years younger. But she has neither my passion nor my purpose, still there is marvelous witchery in youth." She paused, and struck her own brow lightly with her clenched hand. "Why can neither power nor will keep back the growing shadows of age? Hateful age! Had I youth, Beville, he never would have left me without a word—without a line! But I will not madden myself with these thoughts. My latest fancy still reigns, because nothing has arisen to displace it. God knows how willingly I would welcome a fresh impression."

While the Countess spoke, Mistress Beville's quick ear distinguished a low knock at the door; and softly opening it, she held a whispered conference with some one outside.

"What's that, Beville?" called Lady Helmsford imperiously.

"There are two women below begging to have speech with your ladyship," replied Beville.

"Two women! Who and what are they that I should admit them, and at this hour?" cried the Countess.

"They say they can only tell their business to your ladyship."

"They must then. I am not at the beck and call of every impostor that chooses to apply to me."

At this the messenger without departed, but before ten minutes had elapsed again tapped at the door. This time she handed a scrap of paper to Mistress Beville, who with a curtsy presented it to her lady. The Countess, looking at it disdainfully, read the following words:

"For God's sake, madam, do not refuse to see your only sister's child. Maud Langley."

The Countess was standing in the middle of the room as she glanced at these lines, and she remained silent a few moments. A whole gulf of years suddenly bridged over, as her own stormy restless youth—her bright soft sister—her frank, gallant, simple-minded brother-in-law, once most dear to her—all rose up out of the mists of *time* clear and vivid. Her haughty face, however, did

not soften ; rather the small hand, with its fleshy palm and slight long-nailed fingers, clutched the paper with increasing tightness that implied displeasure.

"Admit them," she said at length. She remained standing for the few minutes that intervened, the same dreamy outlook in her eyes, though lip and brow were unrelaxed.

Soon the door reopened, and two women, wrapped in large cloaks with hoods which almost covered their faces, entered. The taller of the two stopped respectfully just within the door ; the other advancing quickly to Lady Helmsford, and throwing back her hood, showed the sweet arch face of Maud Langley, so fair with the inexpressible beauty of innocent youth that Lady Helmsford involuntarily frowned.

"Do not reject a suppliant, madam," said Maud, taking the Countess's disengaged hand and kissing it, while she spoke entreatingly and playfully ; poor spoiled pet as she had been, she did not dream of rejection, specially from a woman. Scarce remembering a mother, she had always yearned for a mother's love, and imagined a mother's sister, herself childless, must offer the nearest approach to that tender relationship. The Countess still kept silent, standing in the midst of her splendidly-furnished and decorated dressing-room—the picture of power and wealth—the long full folds of her gorgeous silk *robe de chambre* falling over her hoop to the floor, her jeweled hand still in Maud's ; and Maud looking up, her soft brown hair disordered by the hood she had just thrown back, smiling yet tearfully.

"And how am I to know you are my niece, young lady?" asked the Countess at length, slowly, reluctantly.

"Look on me, dear aunt ; and see this," drawing from her pocket a small richly-bound book, which she opened to show the Countess her own writing on the fly-leaf.

"Yes," said Lady Helmsford, "you *are* like your mother. I do not doubt you are Lord Langdale's daughter, so sit here by me, and say why you have come. I understood you were safe under John Langley's guardianship, and had been, or were about to be, married to his

son—a very proper, and on his part disinterested, arrangement—with which,” continued Lady Helmsford, lifting up her hand to stop Maud from speaking, “I did not interfere, because for many years your father and I were not friends. He disliked me much, and I always pay back what I get.”

“I have heard somewhat of this,” returned Maud, her eyes filling and terribly chilled by her reception; “but does not death obliterate such bitterness? Let me, however, tell my tale—then reject me if you will.”

In a few words as she could, Maud detailed her removal from the neighborhood of St. Germain by John Langley; her loneliness and melancholy life at Langdale Priory; her reluctant consent to wed Harold—chiefly to escape the monotony she found so oppressive; then the mysterious substitution of a total stranger for the intended bridegroom, and the curious circumstances which ensued. “Finding that they could not induce me nor my good friend Mr. Everard to consent to a repetition of the marriage ceremony,” she continued, “my uncle was sore displeased, and some five or six weeks ago my good Dorothy and I had sudden orders to prepare to start with Mr. Langley for London next day. We had a long and toilsome journey. Since then we have lodged in Mr. Langley’s house; and every day, every day! Harold persecutes me, and says he loves me, though I read something more akin to hatred in his eyes. And John Langley is so smooth—so dark. Oh! I have a dread of evil more than I dare picture to myself! So at last Dorothy, with much painstaking, found you were in London, and where; and though I had no money, she had four gold pieces that that gentleman gave her the day of the marriage; but they were not English pieces and she had trouble to change them. To-night John Langley dines with Lord Berkeley, and a young girl came with some needlework Dorothy had given her; so I wrapped myself in her cloak and stole out in her place; Dorothy followed and called a coach. I marvel how she escaped, for we were well watched. But she turned the key on the poor girl, *and she* will be prisoner there till supper-time. And I

am here to ask you for safety—for life ! Oh, aunt—dear aunt, do not send me back to those terrible men again ! ”

Lady Helmsford had listened intently to this recital, while her busy brain turned over the material presented to it, contriving how she might weave it into the warp and woof of her own web. To reject her niece she saw would never do, either for her character or her influence ; she therefore said, more cordially than she had hitherto spoken :

“ No, child, no ! you shall remain under my protection, at any rate until I have seen and conferred with Mr. Langley. Beville, let a chamber be prepared for my niece ; and this person—your woman, I suppose ? ”

“ My nurse when I was but eight years old—my friend ever since,” said Maud, stretching out her hand to Dorothy.

“ Ah ! Should you like her to share your room ? ” asked Lady Helmsford indifferently.

“ O yes ! I am too frightened—too shaken—to be left alone. But to-night I shall sleep so peacefully—so safe—thanks to you, dear aunt.”

“ It is well,” returned the Countess. “ I am obliged to go out to-night ; but Beville and the housekeeper will see that you are properly attended to. You had better conduct Mistress Langley to the yellow drawing-room ; and, Beville, be sure you send Chifferil to me.”

Beville conducted the fugitives to a comparatively small apartment, hung with amber satin, and, like the rest of the mansion, richly furnished ; here, she said, supper should be served, and then left them.

“ At last, Dorothy, I feel safe,” cried Maud, throwing her arms round the stiff figure of her humble friend.

“ And so you are, my birdie, anyhow for a while ; though I like not yon Countess—she is cold and hard. I wish we were back in France, my child.”

“ Ah ! so do I. But now we have escaped John Langley, perhaps we shall manage that also,” cried Maud hopefully.

“ Perhaps,” sighed Dorothy, not liking to damp her young mistress, yet thinking to herself, “ And who will

pay for the journey, and how should we live?" for she well knew her beloved nursling was penniless and dependent.

Meantime Mistress Beville returned to her lady and reported Mr. Chifferil absent.

"Gone out?" repeated the Countess, with haughty incredulity. "Impossible! Send and search the house. He has never dared absent himself without leave before. It cannot be."

But it was so. The favorite secretary, the obedient right-hand man, was not to be found. Now, when Lady Helmsford especially wanted him for a mission of importance, Chifferil was absent without leave.

While this scene was being enacted at the Countess of Helmsford's grand mansion, the habitual frequenters of "Lamb's Coffee-house," as an obscure tavern situated in a court of the same name was called, were gradually assembling. Lamb's Court was reached by a short narrow passage, scarce wide enough for two persons abreast, opening on the north side of Holborn, a little east of the Bars, and although obscure, was yet well known to a large circle of curious patrons. Men who had mystic signs of recognition, who used peculiar phrases and swore strange oaths; men to whom money was a fluctuating possession, being one month unaccountably flush of cash, and another as unaccountably penniless. Foreigners too resorted there, and travelers of high and low degree.

The landlord was a huge sailor-like personage, with a gruff voice and a jovial manner. He was a Guernseyman, whose long life (he was now old) must have been a roving one, for his knowledge of foreign languages and foreign moneys was remarkable, as was also the excellence of the spirits, tobacco, and coffee to be had at his establishment, while Continental doings were generally reported at "Lamb's" with unusual correctness.

The coffee-room was a large, low, not over clean apartment, with a great projecting fire-place. It opened into the court beneath the overhanging upper story; behind *it* were dark passages and two or three chambers, as brown

and dingy as the general room, but possessing a narrow and cautiously-marked outlet into a miserable crooked lane at the back, which, after many turnings, led to some famous stables near Hatton Gården, where the hard-ridden nags of the gentlemen of the road found provender and repose.

This cold December night then, somewhere about the same time that Maud Langley was suing for her aunt's protection, the *habitués* of "Lamb's," as it was familiarly termed, were dropping in. They were not of a class easily deterred by weather from rambling abroad—principally because they had no very settled abodes; "Lamb's" was about the nearest approach most of them knew to home. They were a motley crew, variable in spirits and fluctuating in attire. He who was last week in the lowest condition of toilette would next appear radiant in powder, perfume, rings, lace, and braveries abundant. Of such changes the frequenters of "Lamb's" were far too well bred to take notice. Moreover they knew each other to be ready to "draw" on the smallest provocation, and that most of those who "thereabouts did congregate" were no mean masters of fence.

On this special evening five or six of the graver and more staid customers were seated at the little tables with which the coffee-room was furnished, in Continental fashion, drinking coffee, chocolate, or more stimulating beverages; while a group of the latest arrivals gathered round the fire. The loudest talker amongst them was a stout broad-built man, his flowing wig somewhat awry, and showing the rough grizzled hair beneath. His dress, of fine and showy material, had evidently been ill-treated; while his small bloodshot eye, coarse cruel mouth, and swaggering reckless manner stamped him as one of those desperadoes who, with nothing to lose, are ready for any work from which honest men would shrink. The others, evidently of the same class, a shade better perhaps, were listening; and one gaunt, gray, old soldier-looking man, of remarkable height, stood silent within the shadow of the projecting fireplace.

"Yes, my boys," the orator was saying, "I was in

grand company to-day. I had the honor of a salute from the Duchess of B—— on the Mall, and had a smile too from the beautiful Mistress C——. Ay ! she would give me more than a smile if I asked for it. But I am going to reform, to grow a respectable loyal gentleman, nay, nobleman rather. I am going to elope with an heiress !”

“With or without her consent ?” asked a shrewd-looking fellow, considerably younger than the first speaker.

“Consent—ten thousand devils ! yes. I am married to her already, only it did not suit me to set up house-keeping all at once. Come you, Bill, Peter—what’s your name ? Bring wine, and good Nantes. You shall drink my health, boys—and my bride’s.”

“Name ! name !” shouted the bystanders boisterously.

“Mistress Nathaniel Morley,” returned the gallant, giving his own appellation with such an exaggerated air of dignity and importance that a shout of laughter broke from his hearers.

“*Née* what ?” asked one of them.

“What’s that to you, who she was ? and what she has is my business.”

“Some publican’s widow ?” suggested one.

“No, no, no !” shouted Morley. Then, sinking his voice, he went on, “A high-born beauteous lady. Fair, tender, sweet, scarce nineteen. And here’s the wine ! Come, now who will help a virtuous loving pair to escape the toils of envious relatives and cruel guardians ? Come, you Hardy, Stephens, Ellis, you are of the right sort ! I want your help, and helping me you shall get a lift yourselves.”

So saying he placed himself at a table in the angle to the right of the fireplace, tolerably secure from intruders, where the men he had invited sat down with him and seemed to listen with profound attention to some proposition propounded by Morley with much gesticulation and many oaths, which every now and then rose articulate above the carefully subdued undertone of his speech.

Meantime some more customers had quietly entered *and called for* what refreshment they needed ; and the

last comer, a little thin man with spidery legs, a wizened face, and eager, restless, light-gray eyes peering from beneath a wig of disproportioned magnitude, laid aside a cloak from which he shook the half-melted snow, and crept close to the fire, a cup of chocolate in his hand. "Give you good-even, gentlemen," he said to those still standing round. His precise voice and neat prim dress looked in strange contrast to the rest. A general "good-evening" was given him in return, and after a few remarks on the weather, the little man asked, "How is the good host? I have not been here for a long time, and miss him from his accustomed place."

"I believe the old gentleman is tolerably well, but less active than he used to be," replied one of the more respectable of the bystanders. "He seldom honors us with his presence now. He has scarce been in the coffee-room since last autumn, when the Spaniard used to be here."

"Ah, indeed," returned the first speaker, who appeared to be in a very fidgety and expectant state, glancing at the door and edging now nearer the fire, now nearer the party engrossed by Morley's exposition of his scheme.

"Ay," remarked one of the older *habitués*, "that Spaniard was a great chum of the host's. He always brought his coffee himself, and used to take him into his own room, and I'll warrant gave him no end of prime liquor."

"And how long may it be since this Spaniard was here?" asked the gaunt man in the chimney-nook, who had hitherto kept silence, and now spoke with a peculiar tone and accent—not foreign and not English.

"Three months or more," said one.

"Not so long," insisted another.

"These Spaniards are slippery chaps," said the gaunt man, carelessly rising as he spoke. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow;" so saying he began to hum a rude ditty, and, boldly striding up to Morley, startled him with a sudden heavy slap on the shoulder. "Hey, old rat-catcher! Hast forgotten thy comrade? Come, let me share what's going. We have had many a forage together, and I never robbed you of your fair half. What's going, I say."

"Why, it can't be ; but yes it *is* the Blazer," cried Morley, starting up, but looking more surprised than pleased. "I thought you were dead and buried ; some said drowned, but I never believed *that*."

"Alive, man, alive ! to serve your fortunes, if so be that they serve mine."

"Sit down then," cried Morley more cordially ; whereupon the gaunt man joined the party in the angle, and soon absorbed the larger share of the talk, to say nothing of his full proportion of drink.

He had not long been thus engaged when the outer door again opened to admit yet another visitor—a tall figure wrapped in a wide dark cloak, one corner of which was thrown carelessly, yet not ungracefully, over the right shoulder ; a slouched hat of soft felt completed the almost total concealment of his face and figure. Yet was there something in his gait and carriage that bespoke a status far above the ordinary frequenters of "Lamb's." He paused on reaching the center of the room, and bowing, raised his hand to his hat without removing it, as a sort of salutation to the company, and calling to one of the tapsters in a deep commanding tone, "Pedro ;" whereupon the man, evidently recognizing the voice, came running up, bowed obsequiously, and asked some question in Spanish, to which the other replied in the same language ; at which the tapster disappeared through an inner door.

The new comer then approached the fire, and, addressing the little nervous chocolate-drinker courteously, after some remarks on the weather, observed, "I have surely had the pleasure of meeting you before—in Paris ?"

"Yes, certainly," said the little man, changing from one foot to the other so quickly that the spoon rattled in the cup he still held. "I remember you well, sir, and it gives me much satisfaction to renew the acquaintance."

"Perhaps then you will do me the honor to sup. They cook one or two dishes very passably here ?"

"Sir, your invitation is an honor not to be declined," returned the precise gentleman, and as he spoke the door *by which* the waiter or tapster had disappeared reopened,

and a man of great girth and corpulence rolled rather than walked into the room.

He was dark eyed, dark skinned, with a broad, bold, honest face. This was the landlord, Jacques, or, as he was more usually called, Jack Robilliard. Disregarding all his other guests, he at once made his way to the gentleman who had just invited the chocolate-drinker to supper, and taking the hand held out to him with the most profound respect, they spoke together for a few minutes somewhat eagerly in French, interlarded with some exclamations in Spanish.

"Allons, Monsieur," said the gentleman at length, laying his hand on his guest's shoulder, "let's retire and enjoy our morsel in peace ;" and he motioned Robilliard to lead the way.

The room into which the host ushered them was destitute of carpet and very simply furnished. Nevertheless a blazing fire and curtains of some thick red stuff gave it an air of comfort and warmth most acceptable on such a night. Near the fire stood a small table, on which the tapster Peter was rapidly setting forth the array requisite for a repast, which was neater and even more ornamental than could have been expected in such a place. As soon as they entered he left the room, and the host, closing the door, stood by in an attitude of respectful expectation. The Spaniard, as he appeared to be, threw off his cloak and hat with a gesture of relief, and approaching the fire, spread his hands to the flame, and then rubbing them together, turned to face his guest and Robilliard. He was a tall, though not specially tall, man—of twenty-eight or thirty, broad shouldered, though otherwise slight of make ; simply dressed in dark claret-colored cloth, with heavy foreign-looking gold buttons. The expression of his bronzed face was resolute and stern when in repose, and his glance was especially keen and bold. His hair—thick, curly, and almost black—was worn without powder—simply tied back with a ribbon, so as to form some approach to that indispensable appendage a *queue* ; this and a short, thick, dark moustache completed the un-English aspect of his whole person.

"Come, Master Chifferil," he said in English, though with a slight foreign accent—a pleasant smile lighting up his dark eyes and softening his face. "Draw near the fire, Master Chifferil. Bah!" he continued, as he noticed the uneasy glance shot by the little man in the direction of the host. "You need not distrust Robilliard. He is the stanchest truest old dog between this and the Antilles—as faithful to the Langleys as myself or you."

"I am sure our worthy host deserves all trust," returned Chifferil nervously; "but these are troublous times, and if it be known that I, the secretary of—no matter who," checking himself, "come here at all, why, I shall not only be undone myself, which is small matter, but be of little further use to you in this affair."

"Can he be of any use anyhow, Excellency?" asked Robilliard somewhat scornfully, as he looked indignantly at the speaker.

"Ay, ay," returned the Spaniard, laughing; "do not be unmannerly, man. Remember, I generally know what I am about, and we want brains as well as thews and sinews. Master Chifferil does well to be prudent."

The host bowed.

"And how goes it with yourself, Robilliard, brave old boy?"

"Cheerily, sir, cheerily; though time begins to press somewhat heavily on me, and men are not what they were. The King over the water has fewer friends than ever. Men come here from Lorraine and the Hague brimful of loyalty and devotion—pshaw! a week's contact with Londoners cools them down mighty fast."

"That cannot be helped," returned the Spaniard, gazing at the fire and speaking as though to himself. "The Stuarts are a helpless doomed race. I was born a Jacobite, but time shows me they will not do. The Hanover men—German boors though they be—are better kings for England. But come, good host, let's have supper, and a bottle of your rare Burgundy after, with your own good company to heighten its flavor."

There was kindly familiarity mingled with command in the speaker's manner. Robilliard bowed, and was

leaving the room when his evidently important guest called after him in French :

"There is a tall rusty-looking man among the drinking party by the fireplace. Don't let him go till I have spoken with him. I think he is one I have long looked for."

"I'll see to him, Excellency ; I'll see to him," returned Robilliard, and turned away, almost coming in collision with the waiter, who now brought in an appetizing supper—a roast pheasant, an omelet, and one or two small dainty foreign dishes, with a flask of wine. Having duly set forth these viands he departed.

"Now then, Master Chifferil, let us fall to," said the entertainer ; "and while we supply our bodies with sustenance you shall satisfy my soul with news. Indeed, 'tis such a night I feared you would not attend my summons."

"No, no, sir," cried Chifferil, seating himself and unfolding his napkin with alacrity, while he spoke with a droll assumption of energy: "No weather—nothing would have kept me from the rendezvous. The hint in your letter of the plan afoot would have fired me to face worse things than a shower of sleet, Monsieur de Monteiro."

"Per Dios ! you are a man of mettle, Master Chifferil. Tell me first how fares the adorable Countess ?"

"Oh, well ; right well," mumbled Chifferil, his mouth full of pheasant, "and more imperious than ever. By the blessing of Heaven she had done with me rather earlier than usual, and went to dress for a reception or a card-party, or I should not have been here in time for your appointment ; but I just slipped out so soon as she summoned her woman, and no one will know whether I am at home or abroad."

"Cunningly managed," replied the Spaniard, filling his guest's glass to the brim. "And does your noble mistress deign to remember the strange caballero she used to notice in Paris ?"

"I think so, I think so," said Chifferil reflectively, ceasing to ply his knife and fork for an instant. "It was

only three or four days back when she asked me, if amid the town gossip (her ladyship always looks to me for tidings—all manner of things) if I had heard aught of Don Juan di Monteiro, and I answered, 'No !' He, he, he ! I answered 'No !' " the little man chuckled at the notion of misleading his haughty mistress.

"Well, I must renew my acquaintance with the beautiful Countess ; for know, my good Chifferil, I intend to employ her services."

"Employ my lady the Countess !" repeated Chifferil, aghast at so daring a proposition. "Good lack ! sir, she is more like to employ you."

"We shall see," returned the Don, with a gay defiant laugh ; "and now what have you gathered of John Langley ? What of his lacquered fopling of a son ?"

"I only was able to find out last week. They are in town."

"And the projected marriage—has that been carried out ?"

As he asked this Monteiro filled himself a bumper ; his expression had visibly changed as he spoke of the Langleys, and he now looked eagerly for Chifferil's answer.

"I think not ; I think not. Anyway, I could gain no certain intelligence—save that there is a young lady under Langley's care, no doubt his ward, the late lord's daughter."

"The young Baroness Langdale !" exclaimed Monteiro ; "a bumper to her, Chifferil ! My lady's health !—I have devoted myself to her service for the present—and confusion to her foes ! That base hound, John Langley, shall never wed her to his son—never !"

"Alack ! honored sir, I know not how you can prevent it. John Langley is strong and resolute, and stands well with men now in power."

"Hear me," replied Monteiro, with a frown ; "but first tell me, what is it links you so closely to the house of Langley ?"

"'Tis an old and a long tale, sir ; but in bygone days

Lord Langdale was a good friend to me in more ways than one. He saved a fair young sister of mine from a sad fate, and lifted us both out of the mire of poverty. I was a clerk when John Langley was first being noticed as a clever lawyer, and I always mistrusted his friendship for my lord. Then Lord Langdale was forced to fly, and I heard no more of him for years; till, happening to be in Paris with my lady nigh a year ago, I managed to steal away to see him, and found him near death, in a by-street of that gay town; for he was too poor to follow the Chevalier to Lorraine. He knew me, and was pleased I showed gratitude; and so I went once and again while he lasted. You remember 'twas at his lodgings I first saw you; but you were too late—he had died that morning."

"Yes, it was most unfortunate," said Monteiro, rising to pace the room. "How was it," he asked after a short silence, "that Lady Helmsford did not assume the guardianship of her niece?"

"There were many reasons," replied Chifferil sadly. "My lady hated the late lord ~~more~~—she knew not of his death till a week or more after; and when she asked for her niece, she had gone with a good lady, the widow of one of King James's officers, who had almost brought her up—none knew whither, or my lady did not care to inquire. Then word came that Lord Langdale had left her to his bastard brother's care; next that John Langley had fetched her away to England, and meant to wed her to his son. Now, my respected host, will you condescend to tell me wherefore you, a stranger, a foreigner, take so much interest in this orphan? Why have you so fierce a hatred to John Langley?"

"I will tell you," said Monteiro, again replenishing Chifferil's glass. "But it is a long tale. I too owe some duty, some gratitude, to the house of Langdale. Have you ever heard of an uncle of the late lord's—a certain Rupert Langley?"

"Yes, I have just heard his name."

"Well," continued the Spaniard, speaking rapidly, "Rupert Langley was always a wild and somewhat reckless gallant, and ever loved the sea. While a lad of seven-

teen he was an officer on board King James's own ship, when, as Lord High Admiral of England, he fought De Ruyter and his Dutchmen so fiercely off Southwold Bay. For some time Rupert was near the King's person; but he was too honest to cringe to priest or favorite—his favor flagged. He fought a duello with a Catholic noble, who had displeased some lady beloved by him, and wounded his adversary to death; so he was forbidden the Court. In disgust, he took to a seafaring life, and became one of the most famous rovers of the Spanish main—a gentleman rover. I had the honor of serving under him from boyhood."

At this announcement Chifferil looked up with a visible shiver.

"Does that frighten you?" said Monteiro, laughing. "Ah! my good friend, I wish all you landsmen were as honest fellows as the brave buccaneers! Let me tell you we have our own code. Never did El Veloz point a gun at any vessel bearing the flag of Old England. We certainly punished the Dutch and the Portuguese, and sometimes had a brush with a Frenchman; but the Captain was always true to his colors, and merciful too—a saint, an angel of light, compared to the old rovers of whom you have heard. But to finish my tale. When his old commander's troubles closed around him, Rupert Langley could not refrain from coming to his help; for he was at that time often to and fro the northern ports of Spain, and learned what was going on. He was, I have been told, present at some of the fighting in Ireland, and aided many of the fugitives to escape in his famous cruiser to France and elsewhere. Then, as his King's cause seemed hopeless, he left these latitudes; nor did he revisit them for many years—not till I had grown to be his lieutenant and right-hand. Then, for reasons I cannot go into now, he sent me to London about three years ago. My mission was to see Lord Langdale, his nephew, and deliver into his own hand a letter. I was also to seek out John Langley, on whom Rupert looked as a promising young man, devoted to the family with which he had the honor to be, even in a side way, connected."

"Just so," put in Chifferil; "that was the character he bore when I knew him in his struggling days—when my Lord Langdale, who was many years his junior, had just come into the estate, and begun to help him."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Monteiro. "I tell you, Master Chifferil, the gentlemen rovers are holy saints compared to such a man as this."

"Your honor is right," cried Chifferil, with somewhat abject readiness.

"Well, I found Lord Langdale in exile; and John Langley sole representative of the once potent house. He received me well; expressed much regard for his uncle; but I never quite took to the fellow. Nor did I show the letter I had for Lord Langdale. I accomplished little or nothing of the matter on which I had been sent, and returned to my—my noble commander, who awaited me at Brest. He was wroth with me for my distrust; and, faith! I was a while in disgrace. Then I believe he contrived to communicate with Langley himself. However, the rising in Scotland was soon after talked of; and Rupert Langley, ever hopeful of the Stuart cause, threw himself heart and soul into the undertaking. His idea was, to rouse the people of the south coast at the same time that Mar raised the standard in the North. He thought he could count on the Langdale men; and, utterly deceived by John Langley, fancied he could certainly trust him. So, with a large store of arms and ammunition, we sailed from Cherbourg, and stood off and on between Hastings and Hythe. All suspicion being directed to the North, we were unmolested, and even sent a boat ashore at Rye, according to some signal my—Captain had agreed upon with John Langley. We met a messenger from him, who had a letter, the purport of which was that, if we liked, we could land our cargo the following night; that he would find a place of safety wherein to stow it; and that all was going well. I persuaded my noble friend and patron not to take aught with him in the first boat, simply to make sure of the ground. Indeed, I strove hard to make him stay behind; but, alas! I could not." The Spaniard paused a moment,

and bent his head on his hand. "Alas! I could not," he resumed. "We landed on a pitch-dark night, and were received by an ambush—soldiers placed to trap us! However, they did not count on the sort of foe they roused: we fought our way desperately back to the boat, but not before the Captain was wounded—shot by Langley himself!"

"How could you tell that in so dark a night?" asked Chifferil eagerly.

"Because it had been a dry autumn, and the scene of our encounter was high up on the beach, where furze-bushes and coarse grass grew plentifully. These caught fire in the fray, and blazing up, I distinctly saw Langley level his pistol at our leader. He fell, and though he rose again and managed, with help, to reach the boat, he was dead before we could convey him on board—dead! the truest, the best! Well, Master John Langley captured neither arms nor ammunition, nor does he know if his victim lived or died, nor that *I* witnessed the murder; but from that day I have vowed to revenge the treachery. I could never bring John Langley to justice, but I shall punish him my own way. I was left in command of our ship and crew, and was obliged to visit the Bahamas before I could follow up my revered commander's last injunction, to see and warn Lord Langdale. When I did, it was too late—he had breathed his last. Since I have not been able to accomplish much, yet I have not been quite idle."

"This is indeed a curious history," said Chifferil, who had listened with deep yet uneasy curiosity.

"But I have not quite finished," resumed the Spaniard. "Rupert Langley had heard in his last visit to France a rumor that the late Queen had granted a pardon to Lord Langdale, reinstating him in all his rights. I have since ascertained this to be a fact, but where the document is to be found, and in whose possession, no one knows. If John Langley has got hold of it, adieu to one means of punishment. If it is above ground, *out* of his possession, it will go hard but I will contrive to find it."

"Dear! dear! I tremble to think of my lord's young

daughter being in that cruel bad man's hands!" cried Chifferil.

"What think you are his designs on that poor child?" asked the other.

"My lady heard, when first we returned, that he intended to marry her to his son, young Captain Langley of the Guards."

"And why does not your lady prevent so cruel a sacrifice? The young lady has doubtless been well and tenderly nurtured, and to give her a husband such as he—pah! I am no saint, but it turns me sick. It must not be!" Monteiro spoke with some heat.

"I fear me much that by this time it must be accomplished," returned Chifferil, with some timidity. "Nay, more, my noble mistress wondered at the prudent Master Langley being so ready to wed his son to the penniless orphan of an exile, which—"

"Is a proof he knows the pardon exists," interrupted Monteiro eagerly.

Chifferil nodded assent.

"Now then, my good friend Chifferil, my scheme is to induce the Countess to adopt and protect her niece. She must be told that this pardon exists; that so far from being a penniless orphan, Maud Langley is a peeress and an heiress. She would not like to see her niece wed to a nobody both by nature and station."

"Ay, sir, it would be the right thing for the young lady to be under the Countess's charge; but who will speak to her? who will care to 'bell so fierce a cat'?"

"I would if I thought it would mend matters," said Monteiro, as if to himself, "but it would *not*. Could you not manage, as purveyor of news, to drop a hint that such a rumor is whispered? or, better still, suggest to the fair orphan to claim her aunt's protection?"

"I might—I might," returned Chifferil reluctantly. "But how, worthy sir, if the marriage is *un fait accompli*?"

"I will blow the bridegroom's brains out," cried Monteiro fiercely; and then, catching a glimpse of Chifferil's dismayed expression, he laughed. "However, I hope to

accomplish my designs without such clumsy work ; but time presses. The best means that I can see to induce the Countess to receive her niece is for that young lady to throw herself on her aunt's protection. The question is, how to communicate with her? Can you manage it?"

"Hardly, sir, hardly," returned Chifferil, with a slight shiver; "and yet I will risk somewhat; yes"—with a sudden uprearing of the head and stiffening of the back—"I will not be overcome by any mean thought of self. I shall ascertain if the lady is really in town, and then I shall somehow let her know that her best chance of safety is in flight. But suppose this young Captain has taken her fancy? They do say he is a pretty fellow."

"Caramba!" cried Monteiro, starting from his seat impatiently to pace the floor once to and fro. "I did not think of that! And she is young, and has seen so little;" reseating himself. "If so, why, it will be the nearest to a checkmate I can suffer. Rather than her fancy should go astray for want of a proper object, I would enter the lists with Harold Langley myself. I should have no objection to a fair well-dowered English wife;" and he smiled with an air of gay coxcombry that sat well on him.

"You wed the Lady of Langdale! You, a—" exclaimed the little secretary, almost losing his head with horrified astonishment, but pulling up before he uttered the objectionable word.

"A freebooter you would say! What matter? I have known as great ladies as the young Baroness who thought none the worse of me for my career! And let me tell you, my friend, that if she is not to my taste, I would not seek her had she a kingdom for her dowry. Beauty," he went on, as he filled his glass and raised it high, "beauty and grace, and youth and tenderness! What are wealth and rank to these? I'll never wreck the joy of life by running my craft among the shoals of greed. No! Let me win place and wealth with this and this"—touching his brow and sword-hilt—"and all I ask of the woman I love or will love is to be charming."

"Time runs swiftly," was Chifferil's answer to this

outburst. "I must soon return or I may be asked for."

"First," cried Monteiro, "let us plan how we may mask our operations. You undertake to warn Made-moiselle Langley?"

"I do—I do! I am not without wit or invention I assure you. He, he, he!" said Chifferil, with a knowing nod.

"No doubt there is a mine of stratagem under your periwig," returned Monteiro pleasantly, "so I leave that to you. But between ourselves there must be free and rapid communication. Wait," he added, holding up his hand for silence. He thought for a few moments with knitted brow. "I have it," he said at length; "is there a corner or a crossing suitable for a professional beggar near your lady's mansion? and is it unoccupied?"

"Well, I can scarce say; but beggars can stroll everywhere."

"Then look in your walks for a lame sailor with one arm, and a blue-and-white checked kerchief round his head. He will always address you as 'Señor.' In reply, ask him what grain he likes; and he shall answer, 'Rye.' Can you remember this? Note it down—the words only; they will give no clue to any save yourself. To this man you can give *anything* for me."

"This seems rare cunning," returned Chifferil, rubbing his hands; "and, respected sir, 'tis my custom to take the exercise requisite for my health during my lady's breakfast (about ten o'clock) and in the afternoon at four."

"Ay, I shall keep it in mind. And you must go? Well, good Master Chifferil, had you not better tell your lady you had met me? that I asked much respecting her—that I long to present myself to her; and add anything more you like. Above all, lose no time in warning the young heiress. If I can help, call upon me."

"Good-night. I must away," said Chifferil, rising with evident reluctance. "The way is long, and later 'twill be dangerous."

"Have you pistols? No. Take one of mine then," said his host carelessly.

"I thank you, sir—I do not love firearms. The good Robilliard will perhaps let one of his young men come with me into Holborn and call a coach?"

"Ay, he shall?" and Monteiro rang a bell which lay on the mantelshef. It was answered by the man Pedro, to whose care Monteiro committed Chifferil, who parted from his host with a curious mixture of nervousness and cordiality.

As soon as he was alone Monteiro drew near the fire and stood in deep thought, while a soft dreamy expression relaxed the tension of his bold bronzed face. Then, again replenishing his glass, and murmuring, "To her sweet eyes," drained it. As he set down the glass old Robilliard entered.

"You are alone, Excellency? Yon little parched her-
ring stayed long—what is he?"

"A man who is useful to me now, Robilliard; and a better fellow than he looks. But have you kept the fellow I mentioned to you just now?"

"I have, sir; and he is an old friend who wants sore to speak with you—here he is."

Robilliard stepped back as he spoke and opened the door, whereupon the tall gaunt old soldier before described, who claimed Mr. Nathaniel Morley's acquaintance, entered, bending his head as he passed the low doorway and then stood upright in the strong firelight.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Monteiro, springing forward to clasp his hand. "D'Arcy, by all that's fortunate!"

CHAPTER V.

THE deep silent rage of John Langley, on finding that Maud had escaped, may be imagined. The antagonism of nature between them settled down on his side into a deep resentful hatred. He longed to have that slender delicate girl, who, in spite of her helplessness, defied and exasperated him, to torture and to oppress. *But she had invoked a powerful protectress in the well-*

known Countess of Helmsford ; and, after some reflection, the judicious Mr. Langley decided that his best game was to win over a woman he dared not attack. Could he get the Countess on his side, all would go smoothly. How he cursed his own short-sightedness in refusing Maud's request, when they first came to town, that she should be permitted to visit Lady Helmsford. Had John Langley dreamed there was so much "go" in that frail soft-voiced girl, he would have assented, and secured the aunt's co-operation, from the vantage ground of disinterested regard for the orphan of his benefactor. But still, why should he not now succeed ? His plans and avowed motives were just and reasonable ; and if Lady Helmsford agreed to his proposition for the young orphan, all might go better than before Maud's flight. Every day that rolled over, without the discovery of that accursed "pardon," added to his security, though an unpleasant conviction, which he could not shake off, haunted him—a conviction that sooner or later it would appear to confound his plans. Having determined on this line of action, he called for his valet and his chair, and prepared to pay a state visit to the Countess of Helmsford.

He inquired for Captain Langley ; but that gallant individual had not appeared since the previous morning. Living in his own lodgings, he was only a visitor at his father's gloomy puritanical abode.

Chifferil had been summoned at an unusually early hour to his mistress's presence the morning after his interview with Monteiro. She was walking up and down an apartment adjoining her dressing-room, where she usually dictated her letters, her *robe de chambre* of brocade sweeping behind her and being impatiently, yet not ungracefully, kicked when she turned in her restless pacing.

"Well, sir ! what insolent vagary is this ?" she exclaimed, as the culprit bowed low before her, and she paused, fixing her large black eyes with scornful indignation upon him. "How can you account for your absence last night ?—an absence unknown to me."

"I most humbly crave your ladyship's pardon ; but

knowing that your ladyship seldom, nay, never requires my attendance after the hour for dressing, and feeling somewhat oppressed with an aching head, I sallied forth to seek refreshment by a short walk in the open air."

"Make your excuses shorter, sir. You should have had your tale more pat. I do not want a volume. More like you sought a tavern, to earn headache rather than to dissipate one."

"I admit, honored madam, there is a measure of truth in your words; for, in my way, I met the Spanish gentleman who used to visit your ladyship in Paris, and he invited me to share a—a—cup of chocolate with him."

"Indeed!" said Lady Helmsford, the expression of her eye changing, though she resolutely kept her frown unmoved. "When I see the Don I shall tell him he must not meddle with the discipline of my household, nor teach my people to be as lax as himself; and," after a short pause, she went on, the tone of her voice softening, "see you do not trespass again. Now what news had Monsieur de Monteiro?"

"He gave me next to none, but was full of inquiries for your ladyship—hoped you had not quite forgotten him, and asked anxiously if I thought you would receive him. I did not venture reply positively, so he said he would do himself the honor of waiting upon you to-day or to-morrow—I can not remember which."

Lady Helmsford was silent for a few moments, gazing away into some imaginary distance, the lines of her face relaxing into unwonted softness.

"A distinguished stranger is always sure of a courteous reception at the hands of an English gentlewoman," she said at length. "Come, Chifferil, to work—I have a letter of some importance to write to John Langley. I suppose the gossips of the house have informed you that Mistress Maud Langley, my niece, took refuge here last night? So I must communicate with her guardian. She is a foolish chit; even after her long story I do not see why she should fly her uncle because he wished to wed her to his son. I have seen the young gentleman, *and he seems a pretty cupid* enough; besides, it is

always difficult to arrange a marriage for a portionless girl. In short, I do not well understand this man Langley wishing the marriage."

Chifferil smiled—a smile so preternaturally knowing, that his imperious mistress cried :

"What do you grin at, man? Speak out! What do you know?"

And partly from habitual obedience, partly in consequence of his conversation with Monteiro, the secretary determined to speak.

"If a certain document could be found, madam, the young lady would have a splendid dowry; and the prudent Master Langley no doubt knows this well."

"How! what do you mean?" asked the Countess, opening her great eyes.

"Surely your ladyship must have heard the report current among certain friends of the house, that her late Majesty, shortly before her death, granted a full pardon to Lord Langdale?"

"No. I have heard nothing of it," said Lady Helmsford, sitting down on a small sofa or settee, and looking fixedly at Chifferil. "I hope, sir, you have no vile Jacobite associates, whereby you may compromise me? How came you to hear such chatter? and having heard, not to report it to me?"

"It was among the people of the Marquise de Boissville, in Paris, that the rumor first reached me, and I would not dare to open a family matter with your ladyship, concluding you were better informed than myself," added Chifferil, with becoming humility.

Lady Helmsford did not reply immediately. She sat playing with the ribbons of her *robe de chambre*, while a variety of complex considerations crowded her busy brain. This hint of Chifferil's came most opportunely. Here was a key to all that was enigmatical in John Langley's conduct. Her niece, then, was a prize, and would be useful in extending her own influence, and increasing her family connections, against the drear days, when, youth and charm and social success vanished, she should want such ties to uphold her. A bird's-eye view of the max-

riageable men of rank in England presented itself before her, and plan after plan flashed with lightning rapidity across the field of thought. At length, rousing herself, she exclaimed, "Write, Chifferil," and began to dictate a letter to John Langley. It was a composition of some difficulty, and was altered and corrected over and over again. But all this painstaking was in vain, for just as the much-enduring secretary approached something like a successful termination, a footman announced that Mr. John Langley was below, and begged permission to see her ladyship.

"Yes, I will see him if he can wait a while."

The servant retired; and Lady Helmsford, taking the oft-corrected copy, slowly tore it into minute shreds, while she meditated what line she should adopt with the successful politician who awaited her. Then, having made up her mind, she rang for her maid and went to complete her half-finished and elaborate toilette.

The moments which intervened before the Countess appeared, formed a very uncomfortable half-hour to John Langley, as—sometimes pacing the grand and lofty saloon, sometimes resting uneasily in one of the velvet-covered fauteuils—he awaited the great lady's coming. The sensitive selfishness of Langley's nature made him peculiarly alive to the influence of his unfortunate birth. Occupying a perch as it were on the border-land between nobility and plebeianism, he felt the exaggerated pride of race natural to those who know they have an uncertain claim to the advantage of good birth; while, on the other hand, his feelings were strongly colored by an envious hatred of those whose legitimate rank placed them far above out of his reach. Could he but preserve his son from the mortifications which had been his mental "daily bread"—his son, round whom centered all the human feeling of his narrow intense nature—by securing for him the family heritage, so that Langdale should continue in *his* line—he felt he would not have lived and lied and schemed in vain. John Langley was a man of some ability and fair culture. Indifferent as he was to the smaller graces of life, he could not avoid feeling the effect produced by

the splendid aspect of Lady Helmsford's drawing-room. The mirrors and consoles, the rare china, the rich hangings, the delicate miniatures in their quaint frames, which lay upon some of the tables, the glow of mellow color, the patrician tone which pervaded the atmosphere of the mansion—oppressed and irritated him : there he was on sufferance.

“Nevertheless they shall not have everything according to their fancy !” he thought. “Lord Langdale’s will gives me legal power over Maud. It shall go hard if I do not carry out my designs.”

The next moment a powdered footman threw open the double door, and Lady Helmsford sailed into the room in all the magnificence of her completed toilette. Her hair, lightly powdered and festooned with lace and ribbon, set off her rich complexion and large tragic black eyes ; a sacque of violet silk, edged with costly white lace, fell from her stately sloping shoulders to the ground, over a skirt of pale-green satin brocaded in silver ; a tight-fitting stomacher and capacious hoop concealed her decided tendency to embonpoint ; and a pair of exquisitely-fitting, many-buttoned, cream-colored gloves reached to where the elbow-ruffles of rich point finished her sleeves. She held a long fan with jeweled sticks ; and a narrow band of black velvet, fastened with diamonds, clasped her throat. John Langley, accustomed as he had been to intercourse with great men, had seen little or nothing of great ladies, and felt surprised at the effect this gorgeous apparition produced upon him, especially as it is always part of a nature like his to hold women lightly, as mere *addenda* to a man’s state, or as stepping-stones to fortune, if *they* possess any.

As soon as Lady Helmsford reached the first station (as an embroidered and gold tabouret might be considered) she executed an elaborate and profound curtsy with the practiced ease which neither hoop nor sacque could embarrass. Whereupon John Langley performed a stiff though respectful bow.

With another curtsy, less elaborate than the last, and a haughty though not ungracious smile, Lady Helmsford

said, while her visitor straightened himself from *his* second reverence, "I think, my good sir, I have had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"Your ladyship does me honor. I was once presented to you by Lord Langdale," he returned, remembering with some bitterness the scant favor with which he had been received.

"Draw near the fire," said the Countess condescendingly; "the weather is chill."

She swept past him as she spoke, and took her seat on a luxuriously-cushioned settee, with her back to the light, pointing with her fan, as she spoke, to an ottoman opposite.

"I have ventured to call upon your ladyship," began Langley in a grave harsh voice, "because of the rash and unadvised action of my niece, Mistress Maud Langley, in quitting my protection—"

"And seeking mine," interrupted Lady Helmsford, with another smile, her clear high-bred tones sounding as if they belonged to a world different from Langley's. "Of course I expected to see you. Maud is a foolish vaporish little chit; but what did you do to frighten her, good Master Langley?"

"I cannot say, save to propose what few young women shrink from—a good husband."

"The young lady," returned Lady Helmsford, with slight emphasis, "said as much. Surely there must be other circumstances which offended her?"

"None, madam; none, upon my honor."

"And you are her guardian, sir, I have been told."

"Your ladyship is correctly informed; my late brother appointed me her guardian."

"Your brother? O yes, to be sure. I had forgotten the relationship. Well then, Master Langley, what is the exact object of your visit?"

"To remove my ward," he returned roughly, stung by the tone with which she spoke of his relationship.

"As you will," said the Countess, shrugging her shoulders. "If," again a gracious smile, "you think *I am not* a fit protectress. But do you not think she may

slip from you again? This is a strange tale of her wedding. She had need be well looked to, or we know not what may happen. Pray, sir, what steps have you taken to free my niece, *your* ward, from this extraordinary and unpleasant entanglement?"

Lady Helmsford's manner at once nettled Langley, and put him in a difficulty. The mysterious marriage was exactly what he did not want to make a noise about. What might come out of a legal process respecting it Heaven alone could tell. So, after an instant's hesitation, and keeping his eyes on the carpet, he replied:

"None, madam. It is a matter so difficult and unpleasant that, on consultation with my lawyer, I resolved that the best way to save talk and exposure would be to carry out the intended marriage with my son. Then, if the adventurer who personated him dared to claim the lady, there would be a real and consummated marriage to protect her against a false one."

"There is some reason in what you say; but I think the young lady's objections would nullify the plan. What did your son do to offend her? for she had consented to be his wife."

"Nothing, madam, nothing; 'tis nothing but a weak girl's whim that causes all this confusion and mars her own fortune."

"I am sure, Master Langley," returned the Countess, with a faint tinge of contempt in her accent, "I care not to embroil myself in her squabbles with you. You are welcome to take her back for me. 'Tis a pity you did not come for counsel to *me* in the first place; nor can I help wishing you well out of this curious piece of chicanery—this marriage. By the way, my good sir, how is it that you, a prudent man as you seem to be, wish to wed your young son to a penniless girl, however high born—one with a tainted name too?"

"I am as sincere an adherent of the House of Hanover as your ladyship," replied John Langley slowly; "still I cannot consider the name of Langley tainted, because the last legitimate owner of it lost himself by a mistaken devotion to a wrong cause. As to the rest, I am under

deep obligations to the late lord ; the least I can do is to provide for his daughter in the best and most suitable manner, and that is to give her for a husband my own son, who is not contemptible either in person or fortune, for I have ever been a prudent and a saving man."

"I do not doubt it, my good Master Langley," returned the Countess, with the same insufferable tinge of condescension which pervaded her tone unconsciously to herself all through the interview. She intended to be most genial and charming, concluding that a man occupying John Langley's debatable position would be ready to give solid pudding in exchange for what crumbs of politeness *she* thought fit to let fall from her lofty table. She slightly mistook the character she had to deal with. "Indeed, this mingling of prudence and disinterestedness is rare ; and though I have no special call to care for the daughter of Lord Langdale, she is nevertheless my kinswoman, and I shall be pleased to have her honorably provided for without cost to myself. How strange is fortune, sir," continued the Countess, putting her head to one side, with a fascinating smile and graceful air of contemplation. "Were my niece now in the position of which her father's folly robbed her, we should all be fighting for the guardianship of so rich an heiress."

"But as she is not," replied Langley, with a quiet gravity which masked the cynicism of his speech, "your ladyship is quite willing to hand over the charge of her provision to me ?"

The Countess laughed a refined, but slightly scornful laugh.

"Precisely so, my good sir. Just think now, even if her late Majesty had been spared from the realms above for a few months longer, no doubt my lord's many friends might have persuaded her to some act of clemency that would have reversed the present state of affairs. What an unreasonable tyrant is death !"

"True, madam ; but one we should be ever prepared to meet," said Langley solemnly ; while he thought, "What does this accursed woman know or suspect ?"

"No one can look on you, excellent Master Langley,

and doubt your preparation at all points," returned her ladyship, with a complimentary inclination of the head ; while she reflected, "How cleverly the dog hides his knowledge, *if* he has any !"

"Then, madam, am I at liberty to remove my ward ?"

"Nay, nay ; you take me too literally. I am not so miserly as to throw all charges on you, most prudent and generous sir. Would it not be better for Mistress Langley to remain with me than under the roof of a gay bachelor—widower, I mean—like yourself, especially pending the measures which you must take in the Ecclesiastical Court to sweep away this embarrassing cobweb of a marriage ? You really must ! We of the higher orders cannot afford to slight these oppressive iron bands which hold our somewhat tottering society together."

"Madam," began Langley, and paused, a little embarrassed to choose his words. If the Countess really meant to make common cause with him, it was a great gain ; if not, would it any more be wise to show distrust ?

"Oh, I shall listen to no objections, Master Langley," continued Lady Helmsford. "You must repair your error in not first seeking me. The young lady shall remain in my house ; and your pretty *polisson* of a son shall visit his *fiancée* here as often as he likes ; and, finally, let the marriage take place in *my* house, under *my* sanction," she concluded, with slight but perceptible emphasis.

Langley, in spite of distrust and dislike, was almost caught by this tempting offer.

"Your ladyship's countenance and sanction are of high advantage," he said slowly. "But my ward's circumstances are so peculiar that I almost fear to trust her out of my sight ; for her own sake, madam, for her own sake ! So bold and dexterous a ruffian as he who personated my son might snap her up the first moment she was alone. I would fain—"

"How, sir, can you think she would not be safe, surrounded by my household, sheltered by my protection ?" asked Lady Helmsford haughtily.

"She is safe nowhere till my son can claim a husband's rights," returned John Langley abruptly and sternly.

"Now can you form no conjecture who this bold schemer is?" asked Lady Helmsford, drawing her fan through one hand after the other, curiosity quenching dignity for the moment.

"None, madam ; none !" said Langley shortly.

"Trust me, 'tis some fool who fancies her an heiress !" exclaimed the Countess, her head again to one side, and her great eyes fixed searchingly, yet mockingly, on him. "But, if so, why did he not carry her away?"

"Ay, there is the marvel," said Langley somewhat uneasily. "I myself believe that such had been his intention ; but the means somehow or other failing, he executed but half his scheme."

"Come now, Master Langley, think you not 'twas some old lover from France? What can you know of the young lady's life there?"

"I but know she was most carefully trained by Madame Wandesforde, the widow of one of the men who fought against King William at the Boyne ; and though her husband was rebellious, *she* herself came of a godly Presbyterian stock ; so your ladyship's niece has been staidly and prudently brought up."

"Poor child !" said Lady Helmsford, with contemptuous pity. "Nevertheless, my friend, lovers are subtle things, and will sometimes slip in through prudence and care and godliness ; and the girl is fair."

"She may be so," said Langley indifferently. "I think of naught save what is due to her father's daughter."

"Well, well, Master Langley, I am not able to give you much longer time. How will you decide? Will you leave your ward under my care? You can reclaim her when you will ; and Captain Langley shall have due access, and be enabled to press his suit under *my* sanction. Let me see : the day after to-morrow will be Thursday. Yes, on Thursday I receive in the evening. Let him present himself ; and, trust me, your ward shall run no risk while with me."

John Langley hesitated yet a moment. It was a tempt-

ing offer, and Harold would be radiant with satisfaction at the invitation his father was authorized to convey to him. This thought outweighed the curious mixture of distrust and enmity which the handsome condescending Countess inspired, and he said :

"The offer of your ladyship's sanction is too valuable to be refused. I will e'en trust my niece to your good care ; reserving to myself the right to resume the guardianship of her person when it seems necessary."

"Of course, of course," said the Countess airily, with a wave of her half-open fan ; while she thought, "The low-bred Puritan ! he should have grasped the honor of my co-operation with both hands. Then we shall see the gallant Captain on Thursday evening," she said aloud.

"He will hold himself highly honored in obeying your ladyship's commands."

"And yourself, good Master Langley ?"

"These gay scenes are not for me," said he grimly. "I am a worker too sombre to mix with summer flies."

"Thank you, sir," said the Countess, laughing.

"Meantime," continued Langley, rising, "I will consult with my lawyer touching the late ceremony, and let your ladyship know the result. I therefore"—bowing—"have the honor to salute you, and say good-morning."

Another stiff respectful bow, to which the Countess, also rising, performed a curtsy more expressive of her own grandeur than respect for the departing guest.

"I wish you a very good day, sir ; and await your tidings."

As John Langley passed through the door a footman entered. "Don Juan di Monteiro," he said, "is awaiting your ladyship's permission to present himself."

"Indeed !" said the Countess, smiling radiantly. "You may admit him."

She turned eagerly to the glass as the man left the room, and hastily arranged the lappets of her delicate lace cap, and the position of the rose fastened among her rich dark curls over the left ear ; and then stood ready to receive her visitor.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE Maud Langley, little dreaming that she was a bone of contention among conflicting interests, enjoyed the first real repose she had tasted since she had left Langdale and the protection of the Rector's vicinity—a sense of relief which was fully shared by her faithful attendant.

A sumptuously-appointed bed-chamber and sitting-room had been assigned to them, but they had supped and breakfasted without any intimation that Lady Helmsford remembered she had guests. And now, the morning meal being some time past, Maud felt strange and unoccupied.

"I wonder my aunt has not visited or sent for me," said the young orphan pensively. "Certainly, Dorothy, it is marvelously peaceful to feel that we are no longer prisoners in John Langley's hands. Nevertheless I would my noble kinswoman had given us a warmer welcome." Maud hung her head dejectedly.

"Ay, my bird ; and I wish too we had been able to bring a few of your clothes with us. A few ! God knows the whole wardrobe is scant enough. Beyond a change of linen, I dared not cumber myself with aught. Now if my lady the Countess would just send her milliner and shoemaker, and all the rest of them, to fit you out as becomes your rank, and then present you to the King and get him to hear your story, he would give you your own again, I'll warrant, for all he is a Hanover rat."

"Hush, hush, dear Dorothy, we must remember my aunt's politics. Heaven knows I would gladly renounce wealth and rank if I could but win peace and safety and a home. Still it is hard to lose one's own, because my dear father was loyal and true. The Queen might have forgiven him his faithfulness to *her* father. Ah, Dorothy, what a desolate year the last has been !"

"Ay, that it has, sweet lamb. But you will win through *yet*, and find a brave good husband. Ah, I wish I saw

you safe and free from that—that good-for-naught who betrayed you into a mock marriage. No one knows when he may turn up and give no end of trouble.” Dorothy lapsed into meditation, thoughtfully rolling up the corner of her apron with her strong bony hands.

“Of course it is frightful to be married to—one knows not whom. But at least the unknown has saved me from Harold. Oh, Dorothy, what weakness and despair could ever have driven me to consent to wedding him? I cannot tell what revulsion of the soul has turned me so bitterly against Harold. Oh! I blush for my own impatience, the want of fortitude that bent me to John Langley’s purpose. I would prefer death now to such a union. Yes, I *am* grateful to that stranger. Trust me, Dorothy, he will come and deliver me yet—there was truth in his eyes.”

“Truth, good Lord! there is little truth anywhere,” returned Dorothy, with a portentous frown and shake of the head. Then, as though absorbed in a more important matter, she exclaimed, more to herself than to her young mistress, “I am rarely ill off for clothes—and *how* my lady’s woman dresses. Even for the sake of this dear lamb I would like to ruffle it with the best of them. Let me see!” plunging her hand and arm up to the elbow into a profound pocket, and fishing up a small leather bag, she emptied the contents into her lap—a large and a small gold piece, and sundry silver coins. “Good lack! that’s all our fortune; and even this we would not have but for yon impostor. I am nigh ashamed—”

A tap at the door interrupted her. On permission being given a small and rather fantastically-attired woman entered. Her morning robe of gay-colored chintz was drawn through the pocket-holes with studied negligence, so as to display a red quilted petticoat beneath. Her angular and dark-skinned face was brilliant with rouge and profusely decorated with patches, its naturally nervous anxious expression carefully subdued into a languishing simpering air. Her pepper-and-salt-colored hair was turned back over a small cushion, above which a tiny lace cap was tied with green ribbon, and a large

red bow was perched coquettishly over one ear. Curtsy-ing low, she rose gracefully and stood with the toe of her red-heeled shoe pointed accurately in the fifth position. Maud rose to receive her.

"Suffer me to present myself," she said, with an affected lisp. "Mistress Letitia Sparrow, *dame de compagnie* to the Countess of Helmsford."

"I am happy to make your acquaintance," replied Maud, returning her curtsy with the punctilious politeness of the period, a movement which elicited another, even deeper than the first, from Mistress Letitia.

"The Countess desires her love and compliments, and hopes you rested well. She would have been to visit you earlier had she not been occupied by business concerning yourself, and she is now detained by a foreigner of distinction. After his departure she will come hither and herself inform you of her interview with Master John Langley."

"I shall be truly glad to see her," replied Maud, feeling a sudden sense of comfort at this indication of friendliness on the part of her aunt. "Will you not sit down?" she added, motioning her new acquaintance to a chair.

"With your kind permission I will; for I am further charged by the Countess to inquire if you were able to remove your wardrobe; and, if not, whether you wish the assistance of her people to replenish it?"

"I should indeed," said Maud, smiling and blushing, "for, save some trifles my good Dorothy managed to put in her pocket, I have nothing beyond the dress I wear."

"Great powers!" cried the *dame de compagnie*, evidently and pleasurably excited, "what destitution for a young lady of your rank! But my lady the Countess will supply your every want; you are indeed fortunate to have such a protectress. Dear, dear! there are mountains of business before us—to say nothing of lingerie and lace, the choice of robes and flowers is a serious matter. Though indeed," to Dorothy, who stood by in *grim* silence, "Mistress Langley's exquisite and varying

complexion will greatly lessen our difficulties. Ah, dear lady, I can well see by the elegance of your carriage and address that you have resided in the polished capital of France. I love that noble nation for the sake of one justly dear to this widowed heart." With a due regard to her rouge, Mistress Sparrow put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Indeed," said Maud, with polite attention.

"But at present I must attend to the affairs of real life," resumed the companion. "On Thursday evening the Countess holds her weekly reception, and it is her wish that you should appear. You must therefore at once decide on your costume and have it put in hands. I have myself something of taste. Let me then suggest a pea-green robe of taffetas, corded with crimson, over a white-satin petticoat, garnished with Mechlin lace and Damask-roses. Methinks your beauteous tint and delicate color would thus enhance themselves sevenfold."

An inarticulate growl of utter disapprobation issued from the half-opened lips of Dorothy ; and Maud hastened to reply, "You are most obliging, but as yet I wear slight mourning, and I should not like to choose without my aunt's approval."

"But the time, dear lady, the precious time," interrupted Mistress Letitia, almost starting from her chair with eagerness. "The dressmaker waits without with a goodly pile of patterns."

"Let her enter then ; I can choose one or two, and submit them to Lady Helmsford."

Whereupon the companion stepped quickly to the door, and beckoning to some one outside returned, followed by a staid-looking woman bearing a box, which, after a general curtsy, she placed upon a table and opened.

Maud was too young and had fasted too long from vanities of all kinds not to be enchanted and occupied by the array spread before her. Rich brocades, delicate taffetas, bright chintzes, silks of every shade ; while Mistress Sparrow, reveling in her occupation, suggested and chattered, and held first one shade and then another

against Maud's cheek with surprising energy and volubility. Even Dorothy was carried away by the excitement of the moment, and so absorbed were the whole party that the Countess entered unperceived. She looked more stately and brilliant in her completed toilette than before. Moreover there was a light in her eyes, a lurking smile upon her lips, which bespoke a softer and more tractable mood than was common with her. She stood silent a moment, looking fixedly at Maud, whose delicate profile was distinct against the light of the window near which she stood.

"Good-morrow, niece," she said at length in kindlier tones than Maud had yet heard from her lips ; at which, nevertheless, Mistress Letitia Sparrow started as though she had been caught in some delinquency ; and Maud, coloring with anxiety, made a movement as if to kiss the hand held out by her haughty kinswoman, but Lady Helmsford checked her, and pressed her lips an instant to her niece's brow.

"I could not come before," she said quickly. "And now, what have you done ? there is no time to lose."

Seating herself, she rapidly turned over the pile of patterns.

"What may be your own fancy, Maud ? Your name is Maud—is it not ?"

"Yes, madam," she replied, longing with almost sickening anxiety to hear of Lady Helmsford's interview with Langley, yet not daring to ask. "It seems to me this gray-and-silver brocade is pretty, though I fear costly."

"It is pretty, child, and will suit you well. Come," to the dressmaker, "take this young lady's measure. Cut the corsage low, and do not spare your lace. Let the petticoat be white silk with wild roses and silver leaves dewdropped, for garniture."

The milliner curtsied low, and interrupted now and then by sharp shrewd suggestions from the Countess, soon measured the slender proportions of the fair *débütante* ; then, as if knowing the tendencies of her employer, she hastily gathered her belongings together, and with another low reverence departed.

"If I might be suffered to suggest," began the companion in mincing tones, but was immediately and relentlessly cut short by her mistress, who exclaimed :

"There, there, Sparrow, do not chatter. Leave us ; I wish to speak to my niece alone."

Mistress Sparrow immediately obeyed, and Dorothy was slowly following, when Maud cried :

"Let her stay, dear aunt ; she has long been my only friend—my only comfort ; and I keep nothing from her."

The Countess nodded.

"She seems safe, and 'tis immaterial at all events ; but my companion is a chatterbox—an ape, yet useful in some ways. Now hear what I have done on your behalf to-day."

Maud clasped her hands in eager anxiety.

"I have had an interview with Master Langley," continued the Countess, "and it took all my skill to arrange matters with him. He has no doubt, under your father's will, a right to the guardianship of your person and property (had you any). Moreover he has powerful patrons to back him up. He is evidently a useful tool to my Lord Berkeley—and greater men still—nor is he unknown to the King himself. Of course, if he chose to enforce his rights, I could not resist. I therefore treated him with friendly frankness ; told him it was scarce fit for a young demoiselle to be alone under the roof of so gay a widower as himself ; offered to receive the gallant officer, his son, as often as he wished to visit his charming *fiancée* ; and insinuated, without committing myself, that the wedding might take place with more propriety and *éclat* under my auspices than his. All of which I could see pleased while it embarrassed him."

"Wedding !" repeated poor Maud in a despairing voice. "Alas, dear aunt, I have had enough of weddings. Ah ! for mercy's sake do not sacrifice me to Harold Langley."

"Pooh, child !" returned the Countess, with a sort of contemptuous goodhumor. "Do you think I should like my niece's husband to carry the bar sinister on his scutcheon ? I have other designs, but it would not do to

display them to Master Langley. Then this strange mock marriage of yours! We discussed that, and it is evident to me Langley has some fears connected with it; for when I wished it to be openly and legally dealt with and set aside, he hesitated, and was for hastening your marriage with his son; then leaving it to your mysterious bridegroom to urge the claim he could not uphold. There is a mystery in all this, but I think I have a key to the puzzle, and my next step shall be to free you from the shackles of this ceremony, slight as they are."

"I know not what you will think, my honored aunt," replied Maud, coloring and looking down; "but I am in no great haste to free myself. If it is a shackle, it is also a protection, and seems to shield me from Harold."

"Good Heavens!" cried Lady Helmsford, frowning angrily, "you have not formed any ridiculous fanciful attachment to the adventurer who substituted himself for Captain Langley? Speak; describe him."

"Indeed, I have no such fancy, madam," said the fair girl, with a sweet frank laugh. "Yet I confess there was something in the gentleman's eyes that drew me to him—a clear truthfulness, like the expression of my dear father; and this is all I can tell of his looks. I should not know him were we to meet, unless indeed he bent over me and I saw but his eyes, *as* I did that day. Moreover, madam, he asked me to have patience and keep faith with him; so, looking on him as a deliverer, I would fain wait a little time longer, for I cannot but believe he will reappear to set me free."

"Do not talk such childish nonsense to me," said the Countess sternly. "He is probably some Jacobite adventurer steeped in vice and crime; and you must be watched most carefully lest he spirit you away, and then turn the knowledge he evidently possesses to his own benefit and your misery. If I give you protection I expect obedience."

The tears stood in Maud's blue eyes at the harsh and imperious tone assumed by her aunt, even while her naturally high spirit rose against it.

"*I will obey you from love, not for fear or favor, dear*

aunt," she said steadily ; " but do I not also owe a duty to myself ? "

" Let us not split straws," said Lady Helmsford, struck by her niece's firmness. " I daresay we shall understand each other by-and-by. Meantime, if you trust me, I can secure you a brighter destiny than you dream of."

" Bright, alas ! " cried the young orphan ; but tears checked her further utterance.

" Come, come ; I hate tears. Here, Betty, Susan—what is your name ? Look to your mistress ; see that she has all she needs. I have a thousand matters to attend to ; but we shall meet at dinner, Maud. Cheer up, child. Mind you look your best on Thursday. By the way, Master Langley will no doubt let you have your belongings if you send for them. Sparrow shall see to this ; they will be a convenience ; " and, touching her young niece's brow lightly with her lips, Lady Helmsford swept away.

" Dear child ! " cried Dorothy, approaching the weeping girl, who had thrown herself into a deep arm-chair as her aunt left the room. " Dry your tears ; " and she knelt beside her young mistress. " I doubt if I ever saw you in such grief even when we were John Langley's prisoners. Now we are truly in far better case. My lady the Countess is right well disposed towards you, though a rare high and mighty dame. She will keep you safe enough I warrant, and not suffer much interference. Come, dry your eyes, and see you win your aunt's heart."

" Think you she has one ? " asked Maud, suddenly removing the handkerchief from her face, and trying to steady her voice. " I know not what to think ; she attracts and repels me. I could love, were it not that I fear her. Yet why should I fear my mother's sister ? Oh, shame ! that I, a Langley, should fear anything. It is not death, dear Dorothy, but life, I fear. My aunt is noble and beautiful ; but, oh ! " with a shudder, " she could be cruel."

" Now you are vaporish, dear lamb. My lady treats you like a princess—sends John Langley tramping when he

comes to claim you, and yet all the thanks she has is to be called cruel."

"Yes, I suppose I seem senseless ; but I so hoped she might be a mother to me, and she has chilled and repulsed me. Nevertheless I will not be despondent ; so fair a creature must have some heart, and I will strive to win her love. Why should she not love me, Dorothy ?"

"Ay, indeed—why not ? and she will, so pluck up heart, my bird. And now I wonder if I might go with the messenger to Master Langley's house, and gather our things together ?"

"Ring and ask," said Maud ; "suppose we ask to see Mistress Letitia Sparrow ?"

"Hum," returned Dorothy, with a contemptuous lifting of the upper lip, "she is a daft-like creature, but I suppose will serve our turn."

The bell was answered by an object that somewhat scared the good waiting-woman—a small negro boy of perhaps twelve, perhaps fifteen,—Dorothy was quite incapable of judging the age of what seemed to her an imp of darkness. Even Maud was a little startled by so unusual an apparition. He was fantastically attired in a striped crimson and yellow silk garment not unlike in shape to a modern blouse, girt round the waist by a gold-embroidered belt, and clasped with what looked like a gold clasp. His arms and legs were bare, save for anklets and armlets of rough massive gold ; his feet were defended by a species of sandal, and his head covered by a small white turban.

A moment or two of surprised silence followed his appearance as he stood grinning from ear to ear—his ivory white teeth and glistening eyes giving additional uncanniness to his aspect.

"Bless us and save us ! what's this ?" muttered Dorothy almost involuntarily.

"Hush," said her mistress.

"Did missee ring ?" exclaimed their strange visitor in a rather soft and pleasant voice. "I sink missee ring ; leastways Massa Chifferil he say lady ring—run, Gomez, run ; an' I run. *Did missee ring ?*"

This was gabbled with the utmost rapidity, and then the speaker drew in his breath with audible suction, though still grinning.

"I rang," returned Maud, smiling, for she found it impossible to resist the contagion of his grins, or continuous grin; whereupon he burst into a loud chuckle, which he endeavored to suppress by clapping his black paws over his mouth, "for all the world like a monkey that had learned to talk," as Dorothy in after years described him. "I rang to ask if Mistress Sparrow is disengaged, and if she could spare me a few minutes of her time?"

"Misse Sparrow? O yes, I run find him. I know where ebery one is. I fetch Misse Sparrow in three two minutes, but missee will just not tell Massa Chiff I'se been in—don'tee, now don'tee?" and backing up this petition with a series of impish chuckles, he made a sudden bow so deep as to suggest total absence of backbone, and disappeared, closing the door with infinite precaution.

"Eh! my dear young lady, what a monster is this!" cried Dorothy, seizing her rough hair in both hands. "Has my lady pressed the devil and his imps into her service?"

"Do not be frightened," returned Maud Langley. "I have heard that it is a fashion in England to have these black pages in great households—nay, they are adopted sometimes in France; and no doubt my aunt is behind in nothing that can add *éclat* to her establishment."

"Bless us and save us!" began Dorothy, when the door again opened and the grave footman who had been "told off" to attend them entered and stood silently awaiting orders. Maud hastily signed to Dorothy to keep silence, and repeated her request to speak with Mistress Sparrow, who obeyed the summons so quickly that Dorothy had scarce time to run through the gamut of astonishment when she arrived.

"Too glad to be of the smallest service to my lady's charming relative," she said, drawing in her head as if endeavoring to get her chin inside the collarette of lace

folded round her throat, in reply to Maud's apology for calling her. Having heard explained Dorothy's wish to fetch the baggage herself from John Langley's residence, and arranged that a couple of stout serving-men should escort Dorothy to protect and assist her, Mistress Letitia said, with her soberest air, "I fear me you have been somewhat startled by a strange visitor?"

"A little negro boy answered the bell," replied Maud, who would not herself have broached the subject.

"Ah! I thought so—though he only laughed and turned head over heels when I asked him," cried Letitia. "He is the veriest plague that ever entered a house, and that spoiled and indulged by my lady there's no living with him."

"And why, for pity's sake, does her ladyship keep such a little monster and make so much of him?" asked Dorothy, with irrepressible curiosity.

"I pray you pardon my good Dorothy's indiscretion," said Maud prudently.

"La! my dear young lady," returned Letitia, "there is no secret. The little mischief was given to my lady in Paris by a gentleman—he, he, he!—a gentleman who was quite the mode in Paris; all the great ladies were dying for love of him, though none knew rightly what he was. He was indeed a splendid personage, though it was said, or rather whispered, that he was a desperado, a buccaneer from the Spanish main, but the great ladies liked him all the better. Now our noble Countess was one of the most splendid, if not *the* most splendid, of the visitors in Paris last November; but one lady, the Marquise de Boisville, surpassed her in one point. She had a negro, a tall fellow dressed like Bluebeard, besides all the usual lackeys, and my lady could not bear it, for this great dame was madly in love with the Spanish gentleman I have described to you, but he affected my lady more than any one else." The companion said this as though it was a matter of personal pride. "And one morning, after they had been at a masked ball together, he sent her this little fellow, dressed as you see him, in a chair, *with a note in which he said that he wished to see his*

adorable lady as surpassing in equipage as she was in grace and beauty. So, ever since, that imp has been first favorite with his mistress. She boxes him herself mayhap, but none else dare touch him ; and from the first, because the creature was chill—'twas in November last she had him—she let him crouch by her fire, even when Don Juan di Monteiro was with her."

Maud Langley opened her deep-blue eyes wider and wider as Mistress Sparrow went on—something in the tale wounded and offended her, she scarce knew why.

"Thus he runs hither and thither at his own will," concluded the companion, "and is cursed with the most itching curiosity, but only half understanding what is said, he tries to see everything for himself. Now, my dear young lady, if your woman is ready, I will see to her escort. It is not well to venture the length of Great Queen Street after dark."

Dorothy rose and put on her cloak and hood.

"I will return straight to keep your company, sweet lady," said Mistress Sparrow. So saying she minced out of the room, followed by Dorothy, who bestowed an expressive look and grimace on Maud as she followed.

Mistress Sparrow was as good as her word, and came back, more quickly than Maud anticipated, armed with an embroidery-frame, with which resting on her knee as a semblance of occupation, she proceeded to pour forth, in "one weak, washy, everlasting flow," a river of anecdotes and reminiscences and conjectures—general chatter—respecting her lady's life and conversation in Paris and elsewhere, and also that of her associates. Rambling as was the discourse, her listener gathered from it something of the characteristics of the world to which she was about to be introduced, nor did the glimpse afford her much edification.

Maud Langley's training and education had been curiously marbled by opposing influences. When Lord Langdale first found himself an exile, widowed soon after his expatriation, crippled in means and too honest and simple to be much of a personage in the collection of plotters, more or less astute, which composed the Court

of St. Germain's, his greatest difficulty was how to dispose of his little daughter when he was glad to eke out his reduced fortunes by accepting a commission from the great Louis.

It was therefore with the utmost gratitude he closed with an offer from the widow of an Irish officer (who had served James faithfully, and died of his wounds in France after the ruin of the Stuart cause in Ireland) to care for his child. Madame Wandesforde, as she was generally called, though deeply attached to her Jacobite husband, was not a little puritanical in the color of her mind. She belonged to a family of presbyterian settlers, and her marriage had separated her from kith and kin. Peculiarly alone in France, liking neither the party with which she had become associated nor the country she was compelled to adopt, she attached herself with all the force of a strong grave nature to the little girl committed to her charge. Under her silently watchful care Maud blossomed into womanhood.

Knowing little or nothing of the world around her, and assimilating her protectress's opinions, modified more or less by her own individuality, naturally bright and daring, full to the lips with life, loving, sensitive, it was perhaps fortunate that Maud's erratic impulsive disposition should have been calmed and regulated by the strict yet not unloving discipline of Madame Wandesforde's somewhat somber routine. Nor was the heiress of Langdale uninstructed in those accomplishments and requirements suitable to a young lady of high degree. Indeed, her education was more than ordinarily solid and complete.

The retired life led by Madame Wandesforde and her charge permitted an amount of reading rare in those days, and few girls of *that* period were as familiar as Maud Langley with the noble poetry of Spenser and Milton. Thus a high if somewhat impossible standard was created in her imagination for the ideal hero round whom the fancies of the least fanciful girl gather. Warm and deep as had been Madame Wandesforde's love for her husband, she ever repented the act of disobedience which had resulted in her marriage and her separation from her own

people—an act to which she attributed all her subsequent misfortunes ; and no lesson was more strictly inculcated on her beloved pupil than obedience to a father's will. Maud Langley, at that undeveloped age when the kind Baron died, would have accepted almost any husband at her father's command. This training had been all in John Langley's favor when seeking to bring about the marriage with his son. It was the instinctive irresistible consciousness which grew upon her when Harold tried to play the lover's part, that dislike, nay, positive aversion, lurked under his seeming, that made her shrink with unspeakable dread from the idea of his ever possessing a husband's power and authority over her. The idea of some mystery which, unknown to her, had its nucleus in her simple self, completed the nervous terror which would have driven her into a brain fever, had she not found repose and partial deliverance in her aunt's mansion.

The occasional visits of her handsome, loving, genial father were indeed sunny spots in Maud's early existence. To go quite away with him, to visit some of his French and English friends, among the *grandes dames* of Paris, was indeed a treat not less enjoyed by the father, who, to speak truth, was somewhat in awe of his daughter's grave *gouvernante*. But by far the greater part of Maud's girlhood was spent in a corner of a partly decayed château near St. Germain's, where, by the kindness of its noble French owner, some of the humbler sufferers in the Stuart cause were permitted to shelter. Here, surrounded by evidences of poverty and dilapidation, her childhood glided into youth ; but the poverty was never sordid, and the dilapidation was picturesque. A vague perfume of patrician bygone grandeur hung about the noble desolate rooms and their scanty worm-eaten furniture, still it was home to Maud ; and, greatly to her advantage, the ample retired gardens, now a wilderness, permitted her more of free air and exercise than the young ladies of that age often enjoyed.

But the return of her father, ill with cold and fever caught while serving with the troops of France against the Archduke Charles, brought the first grief to Maud which

she had ever known. After a lingering illness, the thought and responsibility of which, as by a forcing process, matured her into sudden womanhood, Lord Langdale died; and Maud, penniless and alone, returned to the solemn yet tender guardianship of her early friend; nor was the routine of her life broken for many months, when John Langley made his appearance armed with the authority conferred upon him by her father's will, and then she was forced, despairingly, to bid farewell to all she had ever known of home and companionship. Madame Wandesforde was not so unfavorably impressed by Maud's kinsman as she was herself; something in his grave puritanical air conciliated the one and repelled the other; but it was a bitter blow to part with Maud, and no small unselfishness on the part of the lonely widow to let Dorothy accompany her to the unknown land whither she was going—Dorothy, who had been nurse, cook, lady's-maid, and butler so efficiently for nine long years.

However, fate and John Langley were inexorable, and poor Madame Wandesforde's sole consolation was the belief that Maud's future, respecting which she had had many uneasy thoughts, was provided for and secure.

Such had been the training and experience of our delicate Maud, who now sat listening with dim uneasy disapprobation to Mistress Sparrow's revelations of life as *she* knew it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE bitter weather of the last few days had somewhat relaxed, and a clear moon was shining on the grand new mansions which partially surrounded St. James's Square, rendering almost unnecessary the flaring smoky torches borne by the barefooted officious link-boys who pressed round the Helmsford residence as the fast-coming chairs and coaches announced the usual reception.

Within, the whole suit of rooms occupying the first floor were thrown open and lit up with manifold wax-

lights—one room being well supplied with card-tables, while others were left free for the company to converse or circulate as seemed best to them.

Above, in her own chamber, with a species of fearful delight, Maud Langley essayed the dress duly presented to her at the right moment by the milliner's obsequious apprentice. Never before had the young orphan possessed such a garment. Dorothy, who was no contemptible hairdresser, had turned her nut-brown tresses in naturally-waved folds over a low cushion, and gathered them into a loose mass on her neck behind, all innocent of powder, as was the delicate pensive face, which so readily lit up into archness, of rouge or patches.

When the ceremony was completed, and the *débutante* fully attired, from her white-satin pointed high-heeled shoes with their silver rosettes, to her ivory and lace fan (one of her own few possessions), the sweep of her robe and the folds of her petticoat duly disposed, Dorothy and the dressmaker stood aside and contemplated their work, one with loud, the other with murmured, expressions of admiration.

"At last, my lamb—at last I see you clothed as your father's daughter ought to be," cried Dorothy.

"The young lady would lend grace to any garment," said the other.

Maud, smiling and blushing, glanced at her own image in the glass, and felt ashamed at the thrill of exultation sent through her veins by what she saw there.

"But now all is ready, what am I to do, Dorothy? I hear carriages driving up, but I dare not enter the *salon* alone, and I know not where to find the Countess."

"Mistress Sparrow," began Dorothy, when the door opened to admit that personage.

"Ah! you are ready—that is well," she exclaimed. "The Countess wishes you to be in the drawing-room in good time. Ah, my dear young lady, I protest you look like some priceless pearl! What exquisite taste! Yet I would opine that a thought more of color now? Eh! but my lady has somewhat somber taste; she will have me in this grave gray and black lace, which is some-

what antiquated for me, albeit I am not exactly *dans ma première jeunesse*. But how can I resist when her ladyship generously bestows the robe?"

Maud said with truth that she thought the costume most becoming; and certainly the companion looked many degrees better than in the fantastic garb of her own choosing.

"Let us descend then," said Mistress Letitia.

She led the way, and Maud could not but admire the brilliant aspect of Lady Helmsford's fine rooms. House and furniture were of the newest fashion. The chairs, lounges, and tabourets, framed in graceful sweeping curves of carved and gilded wood, or dark and highly-polished walnut and ebony, were covered with richly-worked silk and satin; and though, to modern ideas, they might be too solid and weighty for convenience, they were light and airy compared to the constructions which preceded them thirty or forty years before. The carpets were mellow in tint and of Eastern manufacture; and Indian cabinets, Venetian looking-glasses, rare china, feather screens, and rich hangings were mingled with splendid profusion among the more ordinary furniture. These well-garnished chambers began gradually to fill with a variegated company. Ladies in rich dresses of every hue; courtly-looking men scarce less richly attired in velvets and brocades, periwigged, powdered, perfumed, lace-ruffled—all moving and speaking with the trained stately grace and ease peculiar to that period, which somehow managed to produce so highly-polished a surface on so coarse a grain.

Maud forgot even her own shyness in the surprise and delight with which she gazed at the animated scene before her. The *dame de compagnie* had introduced her by a side-door into the smaller of the drawing-rooms thrown open that evening, and for some time she did not see her aunt, who was in the first room receiving her guests. Mistress Sparrow had suggested that they should place themselves opposite a wide double door, through which they could see the company arrive. Maud therefore seated herself on a chair, the carved and twisted back of

which rose above her head, and beside a high ebony cabinet, which made an effective background to the delicate elegance and refined coloring of her form and dress. Mistress Letitia perched herself on a tabouret by her side, from which she frequently started in *slaccato* style to perform deep curtsies to the various grand ladies who deigned to bend their heads in acknowledgment as they passed. The gentlemen did not seem to recognize her, but both cast frequent curious glances at her companion, as the appearance of such a distinguished-looking stranger in a society where all were well known was an event.

"'Tis a gay scene," said the companion, observing Maud's riveted attention. "I can assure you there are no other receptions in town that approach so near the brilliancy of a Paris *salon*; but I daresay, fair Mistress Maud, you know these better than I do."

"No indeed; I have ever been a recluse, and never before beheld so good a company. Surely the ladies are most lovely and the gentlemen noble-looking, though a trifle heavy. But I long to see Lady Helmsford—where is she?"

"Oh, she stays near the entrance somewhat longer than usual—he, he, he! In short we have had an agreeable surprise. The Spanish gentleman I mentioned to you, the splendid donor of that—that little black mischief, has suddenly reappeared, and no doubt my lady is pleased to offer him hospitality in her own country. Now I will tell you some of the most celebrated people here. That tall elegant lady in blue and silver, with a diamond spray in her hair, that is the beautiful Lady B—. The Duke of Wharton and Lord Fitzmaurice have crossed swords for her sake. She looks somewhat sad to-night, but that may be accounted for; they say her present favorite, Sir Harry Wilmington, is so deep in debt and embarrassment of all kinds that he has fled—only last week. And there is Mrs. C—, and Lady M. W—," etc.

The communicative Sparrow ran through a dozen names, male and female, ending with a gentleman in unusually simple attire—claret-colored velvet, with no

garniture save gold filigree buttons—handsome, jovial, and resolute-looking, although his face was round and rubicund ; and though well and stoutly made, he was perhaps too short and thick for dignity.

“There,” whispered Mistress Letitia, “look at that somewhat country-looking gentleman in a tie wig, that is one of the celebrities ; that is Mr. Walpole. My lady has the highest opinion of his wit and parts ; she says he can *buy* and *sell* all his opponents. We have but a scant supply of remarkable men to-night. Do you know, that sometimes the great Mr. Pope, from Twickenham, honors her ladyship ; and many others I could name.”

Maud listened and looked with amused interest till a group presented itself which set her heart beating and brought the blood to her cheek in a quick ebb and flow, leaving it finally colorless.

Lady Helmsford advanced into the center of the large outer drawing-room with her usual haughty grace, slowly waving her fan, as she turned her head slightly from side to side, as if equally dividing her attention between her attendants. On her left hand was a tall, slight, and foreign-looking man, his dress contrasting strongly with the gorgeous coloring around him. It was entirely black velvet, unrelieved by anything save a costly cravat and ruffles of point d’Espagne, diamond shoe and knee buckles, and a dazzling solitaire among the folds of his lace cravat ; his own dark, nearly black, hair was brushed back in loose waved curls, and gathered into a natural *queue* by a large bow of black ribbon ; his embroidered handkerchief was drawn through his diamond sword-hilt, on which he rested his left hand lightly. There was an indescribable audacious grace, if such a combination can be imagined, about this gentleman’s aspect and carriage, that struck all who looked upon him ; something in the guarded yet daring expression of the eye, the bronzed complexion, the free step that bespoke a life far different from the finikin fine gentlemen by whom he was surrounded.

But striking as his appearance seemed to all else, Maud

Langley hardly saw him, her attention was riveted on the figure at her aunt's left hand. It was her half-dreaded half-despised cousin Harold, radiant in an amber satin brocade coat, plentifully laced with gold ; his enormous cuffs, deep waistcoat, red-heeled shoes all in the very highest fashion. He too ventured to wear his own fair hair, but it was powdered and curled most elaborately, and beneath it his hard, pallid, but well-featured face and cold blue eyes looked out on the world with a strain of contempt under his self-satisfaction.

"I bring you Captain Langley," said the Countess to her niece, "and cannot doubt but that you will be well pleased to receive the gentleman ;" and the Countess turned to listen to what the other cavalier was saying, and which was spoken with much earnestness and an air of devotion.

Maud rose to receive Harold with punctilious politeness, which she intended should mark the distance to be observed between them ; but, fluttered by the sudden though not unexpected encounter, she dropped her fan. The gentleman in black velvet, who had not seemed to glance in her direction, but to be absorbed in his brilliant hostess, started forward and caught up the fan ; bending low, he presented it without raising his eyes to Maud's ; and, returning to his place by Lady Helmsford's side, finished his interrupted sentence. All was done with such rapidity that Maud had no time even to think of any suitable phrase in which to reply to her aunt, who, followed by the stranger, moved away without further remark.

"Do not leave me," whispered Maud eagerly to Mistress Letitia, as Harold, with a profound bow, addressed her.

"I can scarce express to you, my most adorable cousin, the delight with which I recognize your native beauty and elegance, so suddenly developed by the fine taste of my Lady Helmsford. Zounds, madam ! my father and myself were crazed to oppose your desire to be with your noble kinswoman, but you must well know it was but a natural jealousy that made me wish to keep a beautiful flower for my own eye alone."

"My word! the gentleman speaks elegantly," murmured the companion.

"Indeed, sir," said Maud, with a smile and a slight scorn of manner that became her well, "I know nothing of the kind. However, I am content to receive you as a kinsman."

"Alas! and is that all? But I shall venture to hope that when time proves me to be not quite unworthy your regard, I may be able to efface the impression of that fatal day." He stopped abruptly, a look of fierce anger for a moment replacing the carefully set expression of his features.

"I pray you, Captain Langley, do not recall such unhappy memories. I was grieved for your sake."

"Sweet obligingness, amiable condescension," returned the gallant Captain; but there was a bitter sneer on his lips, even while he softened his voice to its sweetest tone. However, he wisely adopted his *fiancée's* hint, and talked no longer on personal topics; but as Maud could not be drawn into more than monosyllabic replies, Captain Langley was obliged to include the *dame de compagnie* in his conversation, and so held forth in the most approved fashionable slang, respecting drums, routs, ridottos, actresses, great ladies, and "Bold Bucks," who were then the terror and admiration of the town under the leadership of the celebrated Duke of Wharton—much to the admiration of Mistress Sparrow, and the bewilderment and weariness of Maud.

At last the companion proposed that they should adjourn to the card-room, that Mistress Langley might see the whole suite. The movement was a relief to Maud, although Captain Langley constituted himself their attendant, as if determined to display himself as an accepted suitor; but Lady Helmsford came to the rescue. At the entrance of the card-room, where numerous tables were occupied by parties at whist, basset, and piquet, she met the trio, and, with a quick glance at Maud's pale downcast face, said:

"I was coming to seek you, Captain Langley. Her *Grace of D*—wants a partner at whist. I told her I

felt sure Captain Langley of the Guards played a good game. You must verify my words, gallant sir. My niece will excuse you—give me your arm."

Harold was by no means sorry to be released from his ungracious task of playing the lover to so unreciprocal a partner, especially to sit *vis-à-vis* to a Duchess for an hour or more, although she was neither young nor beautiful.

"You have done penance enough, child," whispered Lady Helmsford, laughing as Maud's face visibly brightened. "Go, Sparrow, get her some tea. There are two or three very pretty fellows asking to be presented to you, but I do not see them now." She nodded and passed on.

"Exactly so, dear young lady, let us have a dish of tea, I am faint for want of some," cried Mistress Letitia, and she proceeded, not without many checks, for the rooms were now crowded, to win her own and Maud's way to an outer saloon, where at one side, on a long beaufet, was set forth tea and coffee, and rich cakes, buttered and sweet.

Here, amid the footmen who attended under the direction of a stately butler, flitted in and out, armed with a huge silver cake-basket, the little black page who had so startled Maud and her waiting-woman the day before. The rich and varied scene, the all-pervading buzz of universal talk, the picturesque groups of ladies and their cavaliers, more or less absorbed in each other, with here and there a knot of sober elderly men, evidently deep in political discussion, and a sprinkling of bitter-looking dowagers, who, from the animation of their talk, were no doubt reiving some unfortunate character to rags,—all was so new and strange to our fair recluse that for a while she forgot her dread of Harold and his father, and looked on infinitely amused while she sipped her coffee, unable to refrain from laughing as she watched the little gayly-caparisoned negro flit here and there, twining round hoops and ducking under gentlemen's arms, every now and then refreshing himself by a large slice of cake, putting his little black paw in among the delicate cakes deliberately and unblushingly, without an attempt at concealment.

"Why," she asked when he approached with a sort of bow to offer her his basket, "how darest thou devour these good things without leave?" She spoke instinctively in French, but the little fellow only grinned, showing a double row of the whitest teeth, and shook his woolly pate.

"You speak no French then?" continued Maud, who felt a sort of compassionate curiosity towards this strange specimen of humanity.

"No, missee, no; I speak English and Spanish."

"What would your lady say if she saw you eating the cakes!"

"Miladi laugh! miladi give me lots of cakes—heaps," raising his hand to show the height of the imaginary heap. "Miladi very good to Gomez, so Missee Beville and Missee Sparrow they so mad;" and again he grinned delightedly.

"La! I wonder, my dear young lady, how you can care to talk to a creature like that! You surely cannot set a value on him?" cried Mistress Letitia.

"Indeed he interests me, poor little fellow," returned Maud, gazing at him as she sipped her coffee. "It seems that he has no friend save Lady Helmsford; and then he is human, and feels and suffers like ourselves, though I can scarce think it of the little black outlandish creature."

Here Gomez, who had been looking with profound attention at the speaker, suddenly broke into a laugh, as if he understood and was considerably amused by the drift of the speech.

"Me not black nigger, missee—me brown. Sambo black nigger; me am Gomez, not *quite* black."

Maud smiled and colored; she was peculiarly sensitive for the age she lived in, and shrank from the idea of wounding even the humblest of God's creatures.

"No, no, you are, as you say, brown. Will you take my cup, little boy?"

"Ay, ay, missee, and I'se come back again."

"Did you ever hear the like?" cried Mistress Sparrow, drawing herself up; "the creature talks as if he was *your brother*."

Maud laughed.

"If these poor blacks are men—and we must suppose they are—why, according to very high authority, they are our brothers."

Mistress Sparrow raised her hands and eyes in astonishment at such mental eccentricity ; but Gomez seeing fit at that moment to cut a species of caper, he upset not only the cake-basket but the coffee-cup, in which sufficient remained to make a hopeless stain on the skirt of her handsome sober slate-gray silk.

"Now I know that was willful—I know it," almost whimpered the poor companion, whose wrath was more apt to dissolve in tears than explode in oburgations. "One never knows when he understands or when he does not, wicked imp ! I shall have rare work to remove this stain."

"See, he is sorry," said Maud, pointing with her fan to the little fellow, who had covered his face with his hands, and rocked himself to and fro.

"Sorry !" cried Mistress Letitia indignantly ; and as she said it Gomez removed his hands, revealing his face illumined with delighted mirth.

Though vexed for poor Letitia's sake, Maud could not repress a sympathetic smile ; whereupon the little fellow assumed a graver aspect, and turned to gather up the pieces of cake which lay scattered about. In so doing, he trod on the sacque of the lady who had been pointed out to Maud as a celebrated beauty. She was sipping her dish of tea and talking to the dark foreign-looking gentleman to whom the Countess had shown such marked attention. He immediately seized the offender by the shoulder, addressing him in a foreign tongue, which was not French. Maud could not help being greatly impressed by the complete change in Gomez's look and manner : an expression of the profoundest reverence and also of joy suddenly stilled his face ; he clasped his hands together as if in prayer, and his countenance fell as the gentleman continued evidently to rebuke him in his deep sonorous tones. They were not near enough to permit Maud to hear absolutely what passed, but she could see that the

lady put some questions in a languid disdainful manner ; then other gentlemen came up to pay their court, and the stranger, quietly stepping back a pace or two, disentangled himself from the group, and, with an easy graceful bow, said in excellent English, though with a slight foreign accent :

“ Have I not the honor of addressing the amiable Mistress Sparrow ? ”

“ Why, yes, sir,” she returned, much flattered and fluttered by this address. “ I could hardly have hoped that the modish Don di Monteiro would, among the variety of his acquaintances, have remembered a humble individual like myself.”

This then was her aunt’s famous favorite, on whose gay doings and doubtful antecedents Mistress Letitia had so enlarged. Maud turned her eyes upon him with some interest, but he was at that moment bowing in acknowledgment of the carefully-executed curtsy with which Mistress Letitia accompanied her speech, so did not meet them.

“ You undervalue yourself, madam. I fear that small offender has done you an injury. My Lady Helmsford does not rule him sufficiently. A rope’s end—I mean a flogging now and then—would be well bestowed ; as it is, he has lost his head.”

“ You are right, sir ; the mischief he has done is not to be told ; and here is my lady’s niece ready to spoil him too—was quite upset lest she had offended his darkness by calling him black forsooth.”

“ Nay, dear Mistress Sparrow, you speak somewhat strongly,” said Maud, blushing, and in her shyness slightly turning her head to avoid the eyes bent upon her—a movement of which Monteiro took advantage to gaze at her figure and profile for a couple of instants, as if his soul was in his eyes, yet was there nothing in the look that could offend ; rather a thoughtful gravity.

“ Mademoiselle need not blush for consideration bestowed on the wretched ; it shows the true woman,” he said in fair French.

“ Certes, the wretchedness of this little fellow is splendid,” replied Maud, charmed into animation by the sound

of a language associated with past happy days, and delighted to speak it again.

"At present," replied Monteiro; "but how when his indulgent mistress wearies of him? How, when, the grace of early youth gone, he changes from a toy to a mere lackey?"

"Ah! Monsieur does my aunt injustice. She could never consign what was once favored to misery."

"You think so? you think so?" said the Spaniard, with a tone of amused surprise that somehow displeased Maud.

"I am sure," she said. "But I do not think the French tongue is familiar to Mistress Sparrow," she added, observing the state of uneasiness to which her companion was reduced by the continuance of a conversation she could not understand.

Mistress Letitia had, in truth, been strictly ordered by her imperious lady not to allow Maud out of her sight, or to exchange a word with any one of which she could not give account, for Lady Helmsford, judging Maud by the light of her own experience, had not quite divested her mind of suspicions respecting Maud's total innocence of the trick played upon Harold Langley.

"You are right," returned Monteiro, and continued in English, "how was it that I did not meet you when I had the honor of knowing Lady Helmsford in Paris last—November, was it not, Madame?" to Letitia.

"Yes, sir," said that lady, much relieved to find herself able to share in the talk; "but Mistress Langley had not joined us then."

"Ah! only just from fair France, I presume?"

"Alas! I have been nine weary months in this cold country."

"Say rather noble country," exclaimed Monteiro, looking keenly at her. "All men who love justice and liberty would fain be English."

"I am sure, sir, you do us mighty honor," cried Mistress Sparrow.

"Would you then be English?" asked Maud.

"I am half English in blood, whole English in heart."

"Have I ever seen you in France with my father?" asked Maud, with a dreamy puzzled look.

"Never, dear lady," replied Monteiro quickly but kindly. "I have often heard of your noble father, but never had the good fortune to know him. Wherefore, I pray?"

"Oh, I scarce know. I have met many cavaliers with my dear father that for a moment I—" she paused.

"I was not one of them, alas! and I have but lately come hither."

Further talk was prevented by the approach of Lady Helmsford, accompanied by a very elegant though elderly gentleman, elaborately attired in light-blue velvet laced with silver, who also wore a diamond solitaire and knee buckles, though less brilliant than those of the Spaniard.

"You here, Don Monteiro?" cried Lady Helmsford. "What have you done with your charming partner at ombre?"

"She found others more worthy her notice, and the excellent Madame Sparrow took pity on me."

Lady Helmsford laughed contemptuously.

"Here, Maud, is a gentleman who begs to be presented to you," said her ladyship carelessly. "My Lord Viscount Chedworth—my niece Mistress Langley. I fear me much you will find but a shy recluse, my lord. Come, Don Juan, my guests are all employed. I will give you your revenge at piquet. Where was our last party, in Paris? I mean when you lost—"

"Ah, Madame! I lost all to you long ago," exclaimed Monteiro, with a look of admiration, as he offered his hand to lead her to the card-room.

Mistress Sparrow could not resist giving Maud a little significant tap of her fan while my Lord Chedworth, with flowery circumlocution, was informing her that the grape was never so lovely or delicious as before the dew was evaporated by the glare of broad daylight. Long did the nobleman hold forth, as he had the highest opinion of his own eloquence, parts, and wit. To Maud he was simply a very funny long-winded old gentleman, to whom *she nevertheless* listened with a gentle deference due to

his years, occasionally giving pointed answers, and unconsciously completing the conquest which her grace and distinguished appearance had begun.

"Is it not late? Might we not retire?" she whispered to Letitia.

"O no, not yet; I must speak with the Countess first."

The companion knew better than to intrude upon her ladyship when engaged at play with the highly-favored Don, so Maud had to endure my Lord Chedworth's compliments and assiduities for, what seemed to her, a long time. The rooms now began to thin, and Harold, released from his whist with a Duchess, came to perform his part as an accepted lover, the result of which was that Maud bestowed an amount of attention on her elderly admirer, which elevated him into a state of buoyant delight such as he had not known for years. Albeit her upbringing had been staid and severe, nature was too strong in Maud Langley not to derive a sense of amused enjoyment from seeing the bewilderment of her suitor, on finding that the prize he thought his own might possibly be sought by another. She remembered the careless hauteur of his advances at Langdale, when, unspeakably desolate and cast down, she would no doubt have responded to his addresses had he been tender and sympathetic. Now, somewhat giddy and elated by the new scene into which she was plunged and the sort of adulation offered to her, she turned aside his fine speeches with a playful malice which, uncertain as he felt of his footing in that grand society, filled Harold's narrow mind with bitterest resentment.

At last even Maud's pertinacious attendants felt compelled to make profound bows and depart, for the company had all gone.

"Farewell for the present, my beautiful one," cried Harold, with insolent affectation.

"It would better become you, sir," returned Maud gravely, "not to use the possessive case."

"Why pretend to conceal what must soon be known?" exclaimed Harold.

"Methinks, sir," observed Lord Chedworth, "if the

chance of so great a happiness is yours, you will best show your merit by religiously obeying the lightest wishes of the lady who honors you by expressing them."

"The advice of one whose experience must spread over a long period is of undoubted value," was the insolent rejoinder as Harold, with one more deep bow, turned sharply around and left the house.

"Forgive me, madam, but I could not refrain myself."

"I have nothing to forgive, my lord," said Maud. "My kinsman's breeding is scarce thorough."

Lord Chedworth opened his lips as if to speak, then checking himself, bade Maud and her companion a ceremonious good-night.

"Well, dear Mistress Langley," cried the companion almost before he was out of hearing, "you *have* made a success to-night. Poor Lord Chedworth! I was terrified for a moment lest Captain Langley would send him a *cartel*. His lordship is evidently quite fascinated. I am sure my lady ought to be quite pleased to find how worthy in every way—"

"Oh, dear Mistress Sparrow, say no more," cried Maud, on whom the reaction of her unwonted excitement had already set in; "I know not what has possessed me this evening, but I fear I have been too bold, too talkative. Ah, if dear Madame Wandesforde were here, what a lecture I should have ere I slept."

"Well, it is time you were in bed now," said Letitia, who had greatly enjoyed the amount of attention reflected on her during the evening; "every one is gone. But I daresay you will find the Countess in the farther drawing-room; if you bid her good-night you can retire."

Maud was glad to obey, as she longed for silence and repose; so, treading lightly, she passed through the deserted card-room, from which the servants were already removing the tables, and, entering the inner apartment, stopped short overwhelmed with confusion and a most painful sense of being utterly in the way. Lady Helmsford was seated in a large fauteuil, leaning against one *side*, in an attitude of languor and repose; and on a sort

of low ottoman at her feet, reclined rather than sat Don Juan di Monteiro, apparently engrossed in the examination of the rings on her ladyship's fair hand, which lay in his. It was impossible to retreat unseen, and Maud stood still, her face and throat dyed with the deep blush of shame and embarrassment.

It was but a moment, yet it seemed an age. A quick frown darkened Lady Helmsford's brow as her eyes met Maud's, but it was smoothed away in an instant.

"Come here, dear child," she said in her sweetest voice and without moving, "you want to say good-night. Well, Monsieur, and do you think my ring as fine a brilliant as your own?"

Monteiro sprang quickly to his feet as she spoke, and stood aside with a look of annoyance; while Maud, scarce knowing what she did, came forward and received an ice-cold kiss upon her brow, returned a curtsy to Monteiro's salute, and quickly retreated, all trembling and scared, to take refuge with Dorothy and darkness.

Half an hour after the Spanish stranger—last of all the guests to depart—was putting on his cloak and hat in the hall, when a side-door opened, and Chifferil, pale and worn-looking, came up to him.

"One word," he said.

"I will come outside."

They stood on the doorstep, safe from listeners.

"You have had my letters?" asked Chifferil eagerly.

"I have."

"Is this not a strange and unpleasant tale—of the marriage?" continued the secretary.

"Most strange; it shows some deep plot. Chifferil, I believe you are an honest fellow. You must help me heart and hand to save this fair girl from the crafty designs that threaten her; above all, from the impostor who will seek to force this mock marriage upon her."

"I am indeed at your service for her sake. Has my lady said aught to you?"

"Of the marriage? No. Now go in; you will be observed. Keep me informed of everything, Chifferil—everything!"

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHAT a wonderful world this is into which we have fallen or ascended, my Dorothy,” said Maud one morning a few days after the reception above described, as she laid aside a piece of embroidery on which she had been working for nearly an hour in unusual silence.

“Ay, it is honey,” returned Dorothy, who was diligently darning her own stockings in a cosy corner near the fire; “but ’tis a fine one, and you are among your own sort. I am sure we ought to be happy and contented, for we are well entertained.”

“Yet your voice sounds more like misery than contentment,” returned Maud, laughing as she walked to one of the windows which looked upon the square and drew back the curtains, for the morning was dull.

They were in the small sitting-room, into which their sleeping apartment opened, and where Maud’s time was chiefly passed; for she found her aunt did not choose to have her companionship save when she sent for her—a state of ceremony which chilled poor Maud to the heart, yearning as she was to give and receive affection.

“Your voice bespoke neither happiness nor contentment,” she repeated as Dorothy kept silence. “Come, dear nurse, as I used to call you, open your heart to me. I have seen a gloom in your eyes all yesterday; what is it?”

“Well,” said Dorothy, drawing the stocking on which she was engaged somewhat vehemently off her hand, and turning both her capacious pockets inside out with a sudden jerk, “that’s not a cheerful condition, is it? I haven’t a sous, not one. I was obliged to give drink-money to those two fellows who came with me to fetch our mails from yon prison-house, and to get a pair of shoes for myself. I could not go barefoot in a house like this; and now I haven’t as much as would buy a plenishing of snuff for this *tabatière*,” and she touched a silver box that lay beside her.

"Ah, this is certainly grievous ; but then we have everything we want, and have well-nigh no need for money," cried Maud, with the easiness of heedless youth.

"No need for money !" almost shrieked Dorothy. "You might as well say no need for eyes or ears. The penniless are helpless—blind and naked and miserable."

"Alas ! dear old friend," said Maud sadly as she came and sat low down on a stool at Dorothy's feet. "How can I help it ? How often has John Langley told me that I was a beggar ; that I owed everything to his bounty ; and now I am my aunt's debtor. Why is it that both make their gifts so bitter ? I am not foolishly proud ; I would gladly accept benefits from my own kin, as I would gladly bestow them ; but it is hard to take what is grudgingly given. Why is it that none in England seem to love me ? John Langley laboriously hid his hatred. Harold"—she shuddered. "God's blessing be upon the man, be he who and what he may, that saved me from him," she added, with sudden vehemence ; "and," in a quieter tone, "wherefore I know not, but my aunt does not love me, at least not yet. Ah, I did so hope to find a mother in her ; nevertheless she is not unkind ; but oh ! would to God we were in the dear old home in France."

Hiding her face in Dorothy's lap, she yielded for a few moments to an irrepressible flood of tears.

"My lamb, my honey dear !" cried Dorothy in great distress, "you must not spoil your eyes. Bless us and save us ! in a bare half-hour you'll have to dress and go down to my lady's levee. Here, dry them up ; I am an omadhawn to talk to you like that." Dorothy was of Irish extraction, and sometimes garnished her speech with strange expressions. "All will come right by-and-by. No one seems to love you forsooth ! Why, that quare little soul, Mistress Sparrow ! (Faith, I would rather be alone on the house-top than lead the life she does !) but Mistress Sparrow says every one is in love with you. You just open them lovely eyes o' yours, and pick out a real nobleman, and we will snap our fingers at uncles and aunts ! And don't you be downhearted.

I've just dropped a hint to Master Chifferil, who seems a decent sort of creature"—she said "creature"—"he is my lady's secretary and mighty polite. I just ses to him, 'I suppose now the Countess has in a manner of speaking adopted my young lady, she will give her a trifle of pin-money. It's mighty uncomfortable not to have a farthing,' ses I; 'and them dirty devils of Whigs haven't left Lord Langdale's daughter a rap.'"

"Did you say all this?" cried Maud dismayed, raising her head to look in her nurse's face. "Why, Dorothy, my aunt will think me a beggar indeed if this man repeats these words. No, Dorothy, what I want I will ask my aunt myself; I want no go-betweens." She rose up and stood by the fire looking very grave.

"Ain't I the unfortunate woman to vex you?" cried Dorothy, first giving a tug to her hair and then resuming her stocking; "but anyhow, ye needn't fret, for though Master Chifferil bowed and made a grand speech as what he wouldn't do for you, I'll engage he'd never dare open his lips to my lady about it. He is the most frightened little sinner I ever looked on. Sure I only spoke because I hate to see you without a penny in your pocket; and I am always miserable when my own are empty. But come, my jewel, it is time for you to dress yourself."

But Maud Langley did not heed her; she stood lost in thought, gazing at the fire. A train of most unpleasant reflections had been set in motion by Dorothy's words. The novelty and variety of her life since she had come under her aunt's roof had so dazzled and amused her, that save for some occasional shuddering fits when she thought of Harold, and the uncertainty which hung about her relations to him, she had for a while forgotten the painful mystery and dependence which enthralled her. Now her circumstances seemed to stand out before her mind's eye, in deepest blackness against the immediate brilliancy of her surroundings. She most dreaded the relative who alone had legal authority, which yet gave her no claim upon him. She was penniless, and forbidden by her station and the prejudices of the age to *earn her bread*, even if she knew how. She was loaded

with gifts by her aunt, who seemed scarce conscious of giving, and yet she distrusted that noble lady—much as she admired her. Not even to her beloved Dorothy had she betrayed the little scene she had witnessed on the night of her aunt's reception.

The dexterity of the Countess had almost dispersed the unpleasant doubts and suspicions which had been roused in Maud's innocent heart. Nevertheless, even alone as she thought over the occurrence, she felt the color rise in her cheek when the recollection of her aunt's look, as she bent towards the Spaniard lounging so carelessly at her feet, came back like a revelation of what she had never before dreamed of. No! she felt, in spite of her attempts to reason away the impression, as if she were the depository of a disgraceful secret, and not even to her trusty Dorothy would she breathe a syllable of what she had seen. In addition to the view of such conduct natural to a girl gravely, even severely, brought up, to Maud the beautiful Countess of Helmsford, at thirty-five, or possibly forty, seemed an elderly woman, in whom amatory follies were, to say the least, unbecoming; and it pained her infinitely to doubt the discretion of one she longed to respect. Nor did the handsome Monteiro fare better in her estimation. Dark and bronzed as he was, he was evidently a young man—years younger than the Countess. It was no doubt some impertinent folly of this audacious stranger which had betrayed her aunt into so unsuitable a position. And she would have expected better things of him, slight as had been the conversation that passed between them. He seemed so real, so courteous, so free from the complimentary absurdities that moved her mirth in others. Stranger though he was, she was grieved to be so disappointed in Don Juan di Monteiro, though indeed Mistress Sparrow's account might have prepared her for this or anything. Thus pondering sadly and nervously, Maud obeyed a second summons from Dorothy, and submitted to the solemn process of having her hair dressed.

Below stairs, in her study or writing-room, the Countess dictated letters and looked over accounts, with the

assistance of Chifferil. She was attired in an elaborate dishabille, of which maize-color and crimson were the prevailing tints ; her profuse tresses loosely rolled up in preparation for the public hairdressing which was soon to ensue.

"I cannot make up my mind, Chifferil," she said, looking from a paper on which she had been scribbling some figures, to the little secretary, who sat opposite her. "I cannot make up my mind whether to buy some more stock or to sell what I have. Craggs and Stanhope both advise me to buy—they say it is the most certain success. The Duke assures me it will fail ; nor does Mr. Walpole like it much. Then the price is monstrously high ; even if I sell out now, I shall have done well. The question will be—how to dispose of my capital. Eh, Chifferil ! if I sell my South Sea stock I will only buy or lend on land."

"Your ladyship reasons well," replied Chifferil ; "and I doubt not there are abundance of impecunious young heirs who would give you first-rate security."

"I think I must sell—I think I must," said Lady Helmsford thoughtfully. "I have not done badly, Chifferil."

"No, indeed, madam ! few have your ladyship's head for business matters—money matters especially—and few dream of your success."

"The fewer the better, Chifferil, the fewer the better. I have ever known and felt that money is power." Instinctively the white jeweled hand that lay on the paper before her closed fast, as the Countess again seemed absorbed in thought. "Yes, money can buy nearly everything—nearly. I think I will sell, Chifferil ; I value Mr. Walpole's opinion much. Write—write to my broker to call here to-morrow early. I must instruct him myself."

A silence ensued, during which Chifferil's pen scratched quickly over the paper. He then presented an account-book, over which his mistress looked with some attention. The Countess of Helmsford had a strong organizing and financial faculty, and liked to hold all wires that worked *her life in her own hand*.

"It is well," she said, returning it to him. "The amount is about the average."

Chifferil cleared his throat somewhat nervously. "Have you any commands, madam, touching the young lady, your ladyship's niece?"

"How! what do you mean?" cried the Countess, roused to sudden attention and suspicion. "You are splitting your pen, and writhing like an impaled worm—say out what you have to say."

"Nothing—nothing that need offend your ladyship. Only I presume Master Langley makes the young Baroness—your lady, I mean—no allowance, so, perhaps—a—"

"Well, sir! perhaps *I* will? On my word, Chifferil, you forget yourself. What has Mistress Maud Langley given you to plead her cause? She had better ask me herself."

"I solemnly and truly protest, honored madam, I have never spoken to the young lady."

"I think I know that, still I do not understand your partisanship. Remember, if I find my servants adopting my niece's service I will soon quit me of you all, and send her back to her bastard uncle."

"Who will no doubt be too thankful to grasp the heir-ess he dispossesses," said Chifferil meekly, yet bearing himself with unusual pluck under his mistress's rebuke.

"True—she may be a rich prize one day, and it is as well I should have the disposal of her. I will speak to Craggs and Sunderland respecting that pardon; even if it does not exist, another might be made out, and the attainer reversed. In the meantime, Chifferil, she shall have all she wants, save money. Of that—not a sou! With money in her purse I could never be sure of her. Talk of bolts and bars and dungeons, there's no such shackle as your empty pocket."

"Has the young lady any notion of her real state?"

"You mean that she may one day claim her father's lands? No; and she had better not—she would grow insolent. 'Twould be but human nature; and that would trouble me. I shall but look round me and mature my

plans ; then, whether John Langley likes or not, I shall appeal to the Ecclesiastical Court to undo this foolish marriage."

" 'Tis a trying situation for the young lady."

" It is, it is ! and nothing proves to me so strongly the existence of the pardon as this attempt on the part of some bold adventurer—probably penniless and low-born—so I shall keep her by me till I can decide what to do. If John Langley gets her he shall get nothing else. Now, Chifferil, I think I have seen to everything and given you due instructions. I must to my dressing-room. Signors Andrea and Martinez, the new singers, desire that I should hear them in a duet, and it is the hour I appointed. Be careful, Chifferil, I will have no second influence in my household."

The secretary rose to bow as she left the room, and remained standing in thought, with a somewhat woebegone expression of countenance. " It is a terrible tangle," he thought, indeed almost muttered ; " the odds against that poor child's happiness and rights are tremendous. She wants a powerful friend, and where is that to be found ? The Spaniard is well-intentioned, but what can he, a stranger and a sort of adventurer, do ? "

Chifferil shook his head, sorted his papers rapidly, closed and locked a bureau which stood open behind him, and, pausing to listen to the sound of an arrival, went softly and quickly downstairs, where, in the hall, he encountered Monteiro, who had just come in. They greeted each other with ceremonious politeness, and, after a few studied sentences, shook hands and parted, Monteiro following a footman who requested him to walk upstairs.

He was ushered into a smaller apartment than he had yet seen, nevertheless it was extremely elegant. Paneled in rose-colored satin with white lace curtains, and warmed by a glowing fire of mixed wood and coal. At the farther side from the windows was set forth an elaborate dressing-table covered with exquisite china and silver articles for the toilet, and having at the back a large mirror surmounted by a coronet and draped with lace festooned by *rose-colored ribbons*. A number of chairs were ranged

at mid-distance between the door and the fire, but the chamber was untenanted.

"My lady will be here directly," said the lackey, giving Monteiro a chair and the fire an unnecessary poking.

The moment he was alone Don Juan drew a small slip of paper from beneath his waistcoat, and read it over with quick eager eyes; then stooping, held it to the fire till the last line was consumed, watching the flaky feathery fragments float up the chimney with grave preoccupation, nor did he move for some moments till the rustle of a silk skirt attracted his attention. He turned, and stood face to face with Lady Helmsford.

Her ladyship's dishabille was most careful and becoming. Her long black hair was brushed back, and lay thick and heavy on her neck; rouge and patches and the whole paraphernalia of beauty's armory were duly and admirably set forth, yet a heavy cloud darkened the brow of Venus. At sight of her Monteiro, dismissing his gravity, advanced with a gay smile and debonair manner. Taking her hand, he raised it with a familiar and caressing gesture to his lips.

"How goes it, ma belle?" he said pleasantly. "Here are thirty-six long hours that I have not had a chance of basking in the sunshine of your smile."

"And who have you to blame for that, sir?" said Lady Helmsford, withdrawing her hand with an air of displeasure.

"I can scarcely tell," returned Monteiro, still smiling genially, and attempting to lead her to a seat. "Adverse circumstances and your own indecision, fair lady."

"How my indecision? Did I not give you a clue to my disguise for last night's masque?"

"Dios!" cried Don Juan. "The mists and fogs of this rainy capital must have dulled me, for I did not understand. I thought you avoided the explanation I sought; and so, not feeling over well treated, I went with Don Balthasar di Castro—one of the Spanish secretaries, a far-off cousin of mine—down the river to have a look at the shipping, which always interests me. We dined at the 'Folly House' at Blackwall, and had our coffee and

chasse at that curious floating tavern on the river, and then, and then—oh! I scarce know what became of us after. At any rate, I strove to console myself for not daring to go to the masquerade. I thought your hesitation and—”

“Juan,” said the Countess, seating herself beside but not in front of the dressing-table, and looking at him sternly and sadly, a quiver in her proud lip, “you are in some way changed. Had you cared to meet me last night you would have understood and acted on my hint. You cannot deceive me—there is some new influence at work; you do not confide in me; you have never explained your unexpected presence here. Foolish boy!” she went on, stretching out her hand and drawing him to her, while he slowly knelt beside her with the air of not quite readily yielding to the caressing motion with which she laid one arm over his shoulder. “Foolish boy! whatever scheme you have on foot, am I, an ally, to be lightly dispensed with? Though I am not so very much your senior,” she sighed, “circumstances have been at once cruel and kind to me. I have some power, much experience, and I have none to love. Juan, I would do much for you.” There was wonderful tenderness in these words, and they seemed to rouse her hearer, though not exactly in the way she would have liked.

“You would do much for me,” he repeated quickly, his hold of her hand tightening almost painfully while he looked up full in her face, an eager sparkle in his own clear dark-brown eyes, which seemed for a moment to search into her soul; but the keen awakened look passed rapidly, and was replaced by his ordinary expression of careless gallantry. “You are always benevolent, dearest lady,” he continued, “and I do not think the difference of our years so great that you can treat me as a favorite page—eh, Madame? Faith, I have left boyhood far behind; but how can you say you have none to love when so many love you? and now fortune, or Providence, if you will, has sent you a fair and tender flower to cherish, who will no doubt give you a sister’s love”—he was going to say a *daughter’s*.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Helmsford, putting him from her and knitting her brows; "my niece, that pale colorless girl you have seen here once or twice?"

"Yes, *ma belle*. She is *your* niece, is she not?" he replied, with a mischievous smile. "All appertaining to you must be lovely."

The Countess was silent. It was hard to her proud indulgent nature to feign.

"I do not love her," she said slowly. "I have seldom loved women, and her mother wronged me; besides, there is not much to love in her."

"Perhaps not," returned Monteiro prudently; and taking advantage of the lady's slightly repellant gesture, he rose and drew a chair near her. "But tell me, how was it I never saw her with you in Paris?"

"Because she was not there. It is scarce ten days since she took refuge here from her uncle, John Langley."

"And who may he be that dares to interfere with Lady Helmsford's niece?" Monteiro looked sharply at her for an instant as he spoke.

"Oh! a left-hand brother of the late lord; a back-door politician—a useful, ambitious, clever, resolute dog. He is known to most of the Ministers, and is secretary to my Lord Berkeley, who has been lately made First Lord of the Admiralty. They say he will be returned for S—— at the next vacancy. Indeed, I wonder the lands of Langdale have not been ere this formally made over to him."

"Wherefore does your niece fear him?"

"He wants her to wed his son."

"Surely he is no match for her?"

"I am not sure. She is, poor child, a dependant on my bounty or John Langley's, still I think I shall find her a better match than his son. My Lord Chedworth seems much struck. I think he might do. These old rakes," continued her ladyship, laughing, "like callow fledglings—boys"—with a coquettish glance and toss of the head—"have better taste."

Monteiro smiled a little constrainedly.

"They have, Madame," he said. "And so you intend to wed her to Lord Chedworth?"

"Perhaps," she replied. "But in truth there is a slight obstacle to be removed first. She has already gone through the marriage ceremony."

"Indeed!" cried Don Juan.

"Yes. It is too long a story to tell you now, for we shall soon be interrupted, but it is a most romantic one. She does not know, or *says* she does not know, the bridegroom, yet is not quite willing to have the marriage broken, but it shall be—it shall be." The Countess waved her hand as if her will must be law.

"For a penniless dependant this young lady seems to have no lack of suitors," observed Monteiro carelessly.

"Ah! there is a mystery in that," cried the Countess, "which I may tell you one day; as it is, this marriage must be a great secret for many reasons. See, I trust you more than you do me, Juan. Why are you so changed?"

"It is but your fancy, dear and beautiful friend. As to me, I only seek a small favor from the King, of which there is no need of speaking now, as his Majesty is still in Hanover."

"When he returns I may perhaps be of use to you then, dear Juan," exclaimed the Countess. "If so, command me."

"Oh! how can I sufficiently thank you for your friendship?" cried Monteiro, and rising, he approached, bent over her, and pressed his lips to her brow.

"Monteiro," said Lady Helmsford in a warning tone, while she colored painfully even through her rouge; at the same moment a cautious tap was heard at the door. "Enter," said the Countess instantly. The audacious Spaniard with an undisturbed countenance turned to meet the intruder, who was Mistress Letitia Sparrow.

"Pardon me; but the musicians and the hairdresser await your ladyship's permission to ascend."

"Admit them," returned Lady Helmsford mechanically. She was lost in displeasing thought—the handsome gallant Spaniard was changed. It was strange that

he preferred the brow to the full red lips so near it. If she had a rival, Lady Helmsford felt it was some one not of the society to which both belonged. She had watched well ; for, thanks to her own notice and that of the Spanish Embassy, Monteiro was everywhere, and she had exulted in his evident disregard of beauties—dark or fair, married or single—all his public attention seemed riveted on herself. Now he was talking as genially, as courteously, to the insignificant companion as ever he did to her own high mightiness.

But the servants had ushered in first the French *coiffeur*, who, after a profusion of bows, took a lace and muslin *peignoir* from Beville, her ladyship's woman, which he carefully disposed over her ladyship's shoulders, and proceeded at once to twist and torture her ladyship's long black tresses. The musicians came next—a new tenor and a baritone fresh from Venice. The men who served as the mediums of these important organs were—one, large, fleshy, animal-looking ; the other, thin, dark, eager, wiry—both were decently but plainly clad ; and they were accompanied by a tall, lank, poverty-stricken violinist. The Countess collected herself, and received the trio with grace and suavity.

"I think, my good Sparrow," she said, "I need not trouble my niece—"

But the opening door admitted Maud Langley even as she spoke, and, after a short struggle with a frown, her ladyship succeeded in smiling on the new comer, who, gliding gracefully in, curtsied to her aunt, and took her seat against the fire.

"Do you not see Don Monteiro, child?" said the Countess.

"I have already acknowledged him, madam," returned Maud, a faint color stealing up into her cheek, and then fading slowly away.

The musicians ranged themselves almost against the wall opposite the fireplace, and opened the music-book which they shared, the violinist looking on from behind and tuning his instrument.

Then Lord Viscount Chedworth, Captain Langley, and

the Reverend Joseph Miles were announced in quick succession. Each new arrival bowed low to Lady Helmsford and turned some elaborate compliment, but seemed to regard hairdressing as too sacred a rite to be interrupted.

"I think we are quite ready, Signor. Rogers," to the servant, "admit no other visitor till this song is finished," said Lady Helmsford.

Whereupon the "singing men" opened their mouths and poured forth a rich melody, their voices blending deliciously.

Lord Chedworth, with many whispered flowery phrases, had seated himself on one side of Maud. Harold Langley stood at the other, in an elegant attitude. Opposite, and partly behind the Countess, sat Mistress Sparrow and Monteiro, who had drawn his chair sideways and was resting his arm on the back of it. His suit of dark blue, relieved by cut-steel buttons, his unpowdered hair and bronzed earnest face, being in strong contrast to the *petit-maitre* finery of the other men, though his costly lace and rich sword-hilt gave an air of distinction to his otherwise simple attire. On this side also sat the clergyman, who was a well-known preacher of liberal habits, with, it was supposed, an eye to a bishopric. Meantime the singers sang, and the rich notes thrilled through Maud's frame with a sort of painful delight. Never had she heard such music before! it woke up all the echoes in memory's cavern—the loved and lost came back to her with inexpressible tender sadness in their well-remembered looks; her heart swelled; and though she shrank from showing the emotion she could not restrain—the great tears would gather in her eyes and well over; her only shelter was her large fan, which she opened and contrived to hold between herself and Harold, as if to shade her face from the fire, looking steadily on the carpet, her hand now and then stealing up with her handkerchief to catch the falling drops. At last the song ceased with some notes long drawn out and dying away in honeyed sweetness; then, raising her eyes, Maud encountered Monteiro's fixed upon her with a look so kindly, so expressive of sympathy, that, in spite of her doubts and disapprobation, a warm

impulse of friendliness and gratitude throbbed for a beat or two through her heart. Perfectly frank and natural, she did not hesitate to give him an answering smile that brought him to her side, and made Lady Helmsford nearly drag the curl on which he was engaged out the *coiffeur's* hands, so suddenly did she turn her head at this movement.

"Such music is rare, Mademoiselle," said Monteiro in French, "and very delicious. I have heard Signor Andrea before, but never to such advantage. Have you been to the opera here or in Paris?"

"No, Monsieur," returned Maud, brightening up, her deep-blue eyes and wet lashes looking to her interrogator like violets steeped in dew; "I have been nowhere, and seen nothing. I always lived in an old château near St. Germain—and I wish I were there now."

"But you would not have such excellent music there?"

"Ah no; but I should have all the music makes me long for."

"What! could all your world be contained within the walls of an old château? 'Twould be a small universe for a noble lady."

"So I thought once; now I would fain go back there."

Maud felt somehow that in speaking French with the Spaniard she was transgressing and mortally offending her aunt, though it would have sorely puzzled her to account for the conviction; yet the temptation was too great to be resisted. She noticed, however, that, although fairly fluent, the Don's French was neither so easy nor so correct as his English. He continued to talk with her for a few minutes, conveying she knew not what of sympathy and comprehension that was very delightful.

Then Lady Helmsford exclaimed:

"Come, come, Don Juan, you must not make my niece forget her manners in showing your own command of tongues."

"I am justly rebuked," he replied, turning to the Countess; "but you must not say I have command of

French—it has never become easy to me. Spanish is a far finer language. I wish you would let me teach you Spanish, Madame. Yours is just the mouth for its rich sonorous syllables."

"La, my Lady Helmsford would be weary at such a task," simpered Mistress Letitia, whose observations seldom obtained much attention.

The servants now brought in tea, coffee, and chocolate; and while Lord Chedworth told Maud of some exquisite china he had lately purchased, and spoke of making a party to display it and his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields to Lady Helmsford and herself, Harold, feeling himself less prominent than he liked to be, prepared and presented a dish of tea to Maud; at the same moment Monteiro offered her a cup of coffee.

"Thank you, cousin," she said, but she took the coffee.

"I see," remarked Harold, solacing himself with the rejected tea, "that, like most ladies, you think a French dog better than an English lion. Coffee represents France with you."

"Do not so traduce Mistress Langley," exclaimed Monteiro; "surely she is patriotic."

"Patriotism is not a modern virtue," said Lord Chedworth.

"It is a thing Puritans and malcontents and adventurers prate of," said Harold rudely, with a slight emphasis on the last epithet.

"And would-be men of fashion affect to despise," returned Monteiro calmly. "Englishmen can afford to be patriotic; they have a country as well as a king; an individual existence as well as the faint shadow of some great general or statesman's glory which their own blood and gold has built up. Every Englishman, so far as I can make out, seems to have his own lien on the rights and liberties of England."

"Really, sir, you would be an acquisition in our House of Commons," said Lord Chedworth, smiling not unkindly. "I see you are a Whig by nature."

"*Rather by adoption*," replied the Don. "I know

no more enviable position than that of a member of your great governing house."

"'Tis a goodly heritage doubtless," returned Lord Chedworth.

"Ay, my lord, but it is the non-hereditary house which governs."

"Really, Don Monteiro, you are a philosophic politician rather than what I have ever thought you—a man of pleasure," remarked the Countess languidly.

"Ay, Madame, I love pleasure ; but what man would be content with the sugared water of mere enjoyment when he can quaff the wine of action and work ? That is why I would not only be half but whole English. In this country all men may have a career—privilege and legislative rights are not limited to a handful of nobles ; and the future of England, as the limits that now exist stretch like widening circles on a lake wherein a stone has been dropped, will be magnificent."

The Don stopped abruptly and stood a moment in thought, as if he had forgotten himself and his surroundings.

"But the mother's blood does not constitute you English," said Harold coldly.

"A father's does," retorted Monteiro.

"Pardon me," returned Harold, with his best air ; "your name ?"

"You too would have assumed your mother's name had it brought her wealth with it," said Monteiro curtly.

"But, my dear Don Juan," cried the Countess, who now stood up and, dismissing the hairdresser, handed her *peignoir* to her maid ; "you are of strange opinions. Would you have the nobility share their privileges with the commonalty ?"

"Yes, dear Countess ; it is this circulation of the free air of discussion and widespread political rights that keeps your constitution sound and safe, at least compared with other countries. Perhaps my ideas of brotherhood are somewhat peculiar ; for, having passed my early youth where all white men were more or less noble and privi-

leged, and black men formed the working order, I do not understand the disdain with which, in these countries, each class looks down on the one beneath it."

"I suppose the Don alludes to the Spanish main, where large numbers of blacks are employed on board the pirate vessels," said Harold sneeringly, as he took a pinch of scented snuff.

"Spanish America," returned Monteiro gravely, "where they are even more largely employed than aboard the craft you mention."

"Pray, Messieurs," exclaimed the Countess, who did not like the tone of either gentleman, and addressing the musicians—"pray delight our ears with another exquisite melody."

This time the tenor poured forth a melancholy ditty, but it did not affect Maud like the first. Nevertheless she noticed that Monteiro so placed himself as to intercept the eyes of those on his side of the room, so that had she again been moved to tears she would have escaped notice.

This greatly altered her opinion of the audacious Spaniard; and as she looked with genuine admiration at her graceful well-preserved aunt, she told herself that it was quite possible she might be loved and sought; so perhaps Don Monteiro and she might marry after all, and, thought the fair girl with a sigh, "I am sure he would be a kind kinsman to me."

The song over, Lady Helmsford directed the butler to offer the singers refreshment, and, after many bows, they were conducted from the room.

During this movement Maud crossed to where Mistress Sparrow was sitting by herself, and in so doing she dropped her glove. Lady Helmsford's back was towards them as she acknowledged the musicians' reverences, when Monteiro hastily snatched it from the ground and, with a rapid expressive gesture, pressed it to his lips before handing it to her. This action upset Maud's theories for a few moments; not that it conveyed so much in those days of exaggerated gallantry as it would now, but the *look with which* it was accompanied dwelt long in her

memory. Covered with blushes, she took refuge with the amiable Letitia, who was not a little scared.

"La, my dear, Monsieur di Monteiro will get you into sore trouble if he does not heed," she whispered—an observation which completed Maud's annoyance and confusion.

The remainder of the levee was a painful indistinct picture to her. She heard Monteiro call the little negro to him, and speak for a while in Spanish with a very impressive manner. She was vaguely conscious that Lord Chedworth invited the Countess and herself to an entertainment, including all present in the invitation—which Harold accepted and Monteiro declined. She did not attempt to resist when Mistress Sparrow, giving up her seat to Harold, left her to listen to his forced compliments and vapid talk, which only warmed into animation when he indulged in some vehement abuse of the Spaniard; who was, he said, a desperado, an adventurer, a cut-throat buccaneer; that my lady had better take care of her jewels, and the butler of his plate; that he, Harold, would speak to his father to ascertain through the gentlemen of the Spanish embassy who the fellow really was.

"For I have a right, fairest creature," he concluded, "to know who is admitted to your society."

"I think, Harold, you had better leave Lady Helmsford to choose my society; she would soon order you away if you interfered."

"And then my father would soon remove you," returned Harold in an overbearing tone. "Great as my lady the Countess may be, she is not your legal guardian."

Maud at this rose; and, having now become somewhat familiar with the geography of the mansion, silently and softly passed through a door which opened behind the ornamented toilet-table into Lady Helmsford's real dressing-room, and thence upstairs to her own chamber, even while Lord Chedworth was making his adieux.

"Charming Countess, I kiss your hands. Don Monteiro, I am gratified by your admiration of my country; find a rich English wife, and settle here. We will gladly adopt you."

"'Tis just what I most desire," said Monteiro, with a gay jovial laugh. "English women are the loveliest and the best!"

"You see the fairest specimens *here*," said the courtly nobleman. "Mistress Langley, I—ah! she is gone."

"Gone," echoed Lady Helmsford. "Sparrow, go and see if she is in her chamber."

"Pray, Madame, can you tell me if a certain gentleman of some importance called Sir Stephen Compton is in town?" asked Monteiro.

"Compton?" repeated the Countess. "I seem to know something of the name, but what I cannot tell."

"Sir Stephen Compton," said Lord Chedworth. "O yes! He is a somewhat wonderful instance of revived fortunes. Does not your ladyship remember he had run through his property a long time ago, and was appointed governor of one of the American provinces almost for charity. Why, he even took his daughters out there. About two years since he came back in better case, daughters and all. He is one of the very few Englishmen who can speak German, having been at Zell and Hanover in his youth; and he was at once taken into favor by our German sovereign—very great favor. He is away with his Majesty in Hanover now, and will return with him—when is it? In March is he not expected?"

"March!" echoed Monteiro; "and it is now the beginning of February—over a month then."

But Lord Chedworth was repeating his adieux, and did not heed. No sooner had he bowed himself away than Lady Helmsford, turning sharply to Harold, said pointedly:

"I wish you a very good-day, sir."

It required some nerve to stand to your guns when charged by the Countess, but Harold Langley's was not deficient.

"I hoped for a word or two with you alone, madam," he said.

"Not now," she returned abruptly; "on some other occasion."

"I hope your ladyship will find the occasion soon,"

he returned stoutly ; "as the matter concerns my fair cousin, my betrothed."

"Indeed !" said the Countess haughtily. "Then if you are hurried, write your communications. I wish you good-morning."

Harold felt compelled to retreat.

Lady Helmsford paused till the door had safely closed upon him, and then, turning from Monteiro, swept to and fro for a few moments in angry silence.

"That girl," she said at length ; "that girl—she was sent hither to torment me. Why should I plague myself with her and her troubles ! I will send her back to John Langley, and clear my house of her followers. There is some influence about her malignant to me."

"What !" exclaimed Monteiro, who was watching her carefully ; "the brilliant Lady Helmsford, the esprit fort par excellence, superstitious ? Impossible !"

"Well, if not superstitious, objecting to be worried with the airs and graces of that insufferable coxcomb."

"That is another matter," said Monteiro.

"I tell you, Juan, I will finish this, and wed her to Lord Chedworth."

"It would doubtless be your best course. And now farewell, dear lady, till to-night or to-morrow."

"What, going already ?"

"I must, *ma belle*. I have an appointment."

"An appointment ?"

"Oh, business—business of the severest description."

"But we meet to-night at the Duchess's *ridotto* ?"

"Without fail. And your niece, dare you leave her behind ?"

"Why do you ask ?" with a startled look.

"Oh, lest the bold Captain Langley spirit her away."

"Pooh, pooh ! *He* dare not."

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning after Lady Helmsford's levee, John Langley was still sitting at his breakfast-table, although it was later than his usual time for leaving the house.

The residence of the respectable Master Langley, the capable secretary of my Lord Berkeley, was situated in Great Queen Street—an excellent position. The house was substantial and convenient, and had passed into Master Langley's hands at small cost, in part payment of a debt incurred by the spendthrift son of a nobleman. Master Langley had early begun to lay the foundation of his fortunes by lending, first small, and then larger, sums to the impecunious boon companions of his brother, and those to whom they introduced him.

He was, as usual, dressed with precise neatness, though with careful solid simplicity. The dining-room in which he sat was heavily furnished, with the massive chairs and cabinets of fifty years before, yet all things bore a cared-for aspect, as if a rigid discipline regulated the establishment.

Master Langley had been reading the *Daily Courant*, and laid it down to reperuse a letter which lay open before him; this was in its turn put aside, and Langley sat for a few minutes looking in a somewhat expectant manner at the door.

It opened at last to admit Harold, who entered, dressed in the uniform of his regiment—the Coldstream Guards.

"Well, sir, you are late?"

"Could not help it, sir; I was on duty this morning. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales did us the honor of an early inspection."

"Indeed! Anyhow, Harold, I am glad to have an opportunity of discussing matters with you. Albeit I must soon be at the Admiralty. It is as hard to catch you as if you were First Minister."

"I was coming to see you to-day, sir, even if you had not sent for me."

"Indeed, Harold ! Then you want something ?"

"Yes, father ; I want you to fulfill your promise. Gad ! I am ashamed, after the certain promises *I* made to all my tradespeople, to have them still dunning and hunting me. Come, sir ! you know you said you would set me right if I would wed your niece. I am ready to keep my word—why will you not keep yours ?"

"When you are Maud Langley's husband you shall not have a debt in the world ; till you are, boy, I do not feel sure of you. You do not like the girl, and you can be so easily drawn away by any whim or fancy that crosses you, I dare not relax the slightest precaution in the difficult game we are playing."

"On my honor, sir," said Harold earnestly, "I am quite as anxious for the marriage as you can possibly be ; but, zounds ! if you will not satisfy my creditors, I fear I shall very soon be where I can neither make nor mar your plots."

"You mean you will be in the King's Bench ? Tush ! you shall not, my son ; I will see to that. Meantime tell me how you prosper. Is my Lady Helmsford gracious ? Is Mistress Maud more propitious ? How do you stand ?"

"Well, in truth I hardly know ! The Countess is—I cannot say I have aught to complain of, yet she makes me feel wondrous small ; and I cannot help conjecturing that she would throw us over at any moment. Madam Maud herself is just the devil's own mixture of sweet coldness and polished pride." Harold frowned uncomfortably. "I like not the company round her. There is an old spindleshanks who is ready to fall at her feet—do you know him, sir ?—Lord Chedworth ?"

"I do, I do," returned Master Langley, with much interest. "A wealthy and independent nobleman—a dangerous rival, Harold."

Harold laughed contemptuously.

"There is another man whom I should fear much more, only he is evidently the Countess's lover—and trust her to take care of him—a stranger, an adventurer. I wish you could make out something respecting him—a Don Juan di

Monteiro. He is evidently well-known to the Spanish Ambassador ; but there is something about the fellow I abhor and distrust."

"If he is an adventurer," said Master Langley slowly, "he will seek to wed with the rich widow rather than the penniless spinster. I will, however, make inquiries. But Lord Chedworth, he is more dangerous. He is quite rich enough to indulge fancy ; and by the ordinary law of such matters, the pardon is much more likely to be discovered for the benefit of the Viscountess Chedworth than for the poor orphan. I wish, Harold, we had not brought that troublesome piece of female flesh to town. Her escape to Lady Helmsford was a most crooked bit of ill-fortune ; we could have managed her better at Langdale."

"There was that parson in the way there."

"The parson was easier to deal with than the Countess."

"Ay, sir. But why do we hesitate and delay in this fashion ? Take heart of grace, sir, and lose no time in breaking this accursed marriage. It is impossible any harm can come of your taking action. 'Tis your duty, as Maud's guardian ; then resume the custody of her person. Even if the pardon is produced, you are none the less her guardian—she will not be of age for two years."

"There is reason in what you say, Harold ; yet I would that she were in my hands again."

"Upon my soul !" cried the young guardsman, "the play is scarce worth the candle. What a troublesome coil the whole thing is ! I do not think I would care to follow it up were it not to spite and outwit the scoundrel who trapped me."

"You foolish boy ! Maud Langley is the best and the greatest match for you. I have sworn that you shall be Lord of Langdale. Pardon or no pardon, wed her ! Once she is your wife, I could with a good grace plead for the reversal of the attainder. She *must* be in our hands again, and soon." Master Langley paused, looked keenly at *his son*, and continued in a lower tone, but with cynical

calmness : "I have the outline of a romantic plot in my head. Why should you not, in the ardor of your passion for your fair cousin, take advantage of the fear which possesses us all, lest the impostor who personated you carry her away, and elope with her yourself—of *course*, without my knowledge. The unknown bridegroom would get the credit of the raid ; and when, after a week or so *passed alone* with you, you bring her back to ask my paternal blessing, she would be ready enough to allow the legalizing of one marriage and the rupture of the other."

"Fore heaven ! 'tis a rare scheme, and a villainous one," cried Harold. "Why, sir, you will compose a poem next ! Yet I do not see why my young lady should object to me. I will make her as good a husband as she need desire. But what prompted so excellent a device ?"

"I can scarce take time to tell you now, Harold. Only yesterday I met the poor wretch who first brought me news that the pardon existed. He looked indeed miserable, and without waiting to be asked I gave him an alms ; whereupon, with many thanks, he begged to speak with me—he said he had been seeking me. It seems he has been reduced to carry a chair or hold a link, and in some way has heard of a scheme to carry off the Langdale orphan. It seems one of the commoner sort of Jacobites, who infest some tavern behind Holborn, is the man who personated the bridegroom on that unlucky day. I imagine he performed his part at the bidding of some one else, and now he is inclined to turn the scheme to his own advantage ; but it also seems that he is unable to act for want of funds, and that the fact of young Mistress Langley being under Lady Helmsford's roof is a difficulty. Were she under mine, Harold, how simple the affair would be. However, if the would-be gallant is poor, he can be bought. I will contrive an interview and sound him."

"'Tis a strange invention," replied Harold, with a sort of reluctant admiration. "I daresay we will end by being a fair specimen of a fashionable couple, Mistress

Maud and myself. But I wish it was beautiful Kitty Barlow I was to run away with."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed his father, with supreme contempt. "In a question of marriage I imagine one woman is as good as another. Yet I remember having to struggle with myself. When I was young I was sorely tempted to marry a pretty humble lass, but I resisted, my son, I resisted. Now be wary and adroit, play the lover cunningly. I will see to the matter I have indicated. I would have you wed before his Majesty returns. Lord Sunderland is my friend, so is Craggs—I can count on my Lord Berkeley, and 'twill go hard if sympathy with a dispossessed orphan and a pair of true lovers will not induce them to settle the heritage of Langdale in the new and the right line."

"Zounds, sir! you ought to be Prime Minister yourself," cried Harold; "and Snippet, my confiding tailor, and Truefit, and the rest of the pack that are in full cry, you'll give them something to worry on—just to keep them quiet? On my word I am at your service?"

"I believe it, Harold—so make your mind easy on that point. Sup with me to-night, I shall have more to say; my time is now at an end."

Harold rose and walked to the fireplace. He leant against the mantelpiece for a moment in silence, and then exclaimed:

"By —— I'll be glad when the play is played out! It will take no small amount of courage to face Maud Langley when her blood is up—"

"Afraid?" said his father contemptuously—"afraid of a girl who will probably turn from indifference to doating when she finds what you have dared and done for her?"

"Well, 'tis as like she will as not."

"And the sooner we take action the better," continued John Langley, with unusual animation. "For if any entanglement occurs between my ward and Lord Chedworth 'twill increase our difficulties tenfold."

"He is a fantastic scarecrow to fear as a rival."

"A scarecrow with ten or fifteen thousand a year

must always be formidable. But good-morrow to you, Harold, I am already late ;” and, formal even in his intercourse with his son, Master Langley bowed and left the room.

Harold walked restlessly to and fro for a while, with an uneasy expression of countenance. At last he rang, and asked the servant who appeared if he could bring him some brandy.

“Indeed I cannot, sir. I doubt if there’s any spirits in the house, and your worshipful father always carries the keys himself. A cup of ale now—”

“Bring it !” interrupted Harold, again resting against the mantelpiece. The man went and came back quickly, bearing a jug and glass. He poured out the desired beverage, frothing it up to the best of his ability. Harold took a hasty draught and then set down the glass with a grimace of unspeakable disgust.

“Sblood !” he exclaimed, “if my father can brew such inventions over rot-gut tippie like this, gad ! he’d outplot the College of Jesuits with a bottle of Burgundy.”

So saying he seized his feathered hat and hastily left the house.

The gay guardsman swaggered down Long Acre, and turning into “Leicester Fields,” he sauntered past the residence of the Prince of Wales—greeting some acquaintance as he went—intending to call upon a brother officer and ascertain if he was inclined to accompany him to the famous cock-pit at Westminster, to see if any sport was going on. At the corner of the Haymarket a tall gaunt man in high boots, a suit of crimson cloth much rubbed and stained, but surmounted by a handsomely-laced beaver, coming from an opposite direction, and apparently in deep thought, ran against him.

“Gad’s blood, sir ! don’t you see where you are going ?” cried the insolent fine gentleman, who felt both anxious and consequently irritable for more reasons than one.

“Begad I do—when there’s anything worth seeing,” retorted the other, with a peculiar accent and an air of the profoundest contempt.

This completely overset the small balance of self-control which the previous night's carouse and the morning's conversation had left Harold ; and telling the gaunt man to "Clear the way, for a presumptuous cut-throat ?" he attempted to pass on.

"Oh ! I'm a cut-throat, am I ? Well, you ought to know who is and who isn't, seeing you wear the butcher's livery."

"S'death, sir !" cried Harold, "I'll make you eat your words."

"Here's a knife to cut them then," replied the other, drawing his long rapier, and still preserving his cool contemptuous tone ; "out with your toasting-fork, young gentleman, and I'll give you a lesson in *carte and tierce*."

The passers-by paused, delighted. "A fight between two bloods," they said to each other. "I'll back the young 'un." "No, no, Longshanks looks as if he knew how to handle his blade."

They gathered round and formed a ring at the first sound of the steel, for Harold Langley had flashed out his sword before his adversary had ceased speaking.

"Well parried," said the gaunt man after the first few passes. "A clever *seconde*. Faith ! you've had a French master of fence, don't be in a hurry," as Harold pressed on him furiously.

The lookers-on applauded. The few women of the better class who happened to be amongst them uttered small shrieks and exclamations, yet nevertheless held back their hoods to gaze with immense interest at the conflict. As the crowd increased, a small neatly-dressed man, wrapped in a comfortable cloak and having an air of the severest respectability, was pushed to the front, evidently against his will, as he was endeavoring to cross to the opposite side of the Haymarket by skirting the scene of the fray.

"Tis a disgrace to a civilized people," he murmured, "to have these brawls in their streets. Certes, gentlemen, ye should separate the combatants rather than encourage them by on-looking."

His words, however, fell unheeded by those nearest

him, and he himself, with a sudden exclamation, paused, seemingly struck with the same interest as the rest.

"'Tis he himself—Captain Langley," he said aloud ; "now would my lady be well pleased were he just slightly disabled for a time." This he thought ; but as he thought the tall rusty man, with a smart cut over the point and dexterous turn of his powerful wrist, sent Harold's rapier flying out of his grasp.

The successful swordsman immediately picked it up, and presenting it with an air of chivalrous politeness to his antagonist, said :

"Well fought, sir ! you have been fairly trained, though scarce in so high a school as myself. Now go home, and the next time a decent man chances to run against you, keep a civil tongue in your head." Lifting his hat, he replaced it with a fierce cock over his left eye, and strode solemnly away.

The little crowd speedily dispersed, the women, as they passed on, declaring the young officer to be a "pretty fellow," and hoping the rusty man had not hurt him with the cruel sharp twist he had given his hand. Harold himself, rather restored to equanimity by this outlet to his ill-humor, sheathed his sword and went his way.

Meantime the small gentleman (Chifferil, in short) picked his way down the Haymarket and through the labyrinth of narrow streets which then covered the site of Trafalgar Square, and turned down Salisbury Street, quickening his steps along the Strand, where he curiously examined the numbers of the houses, and finally knocked at a door. It was opened by a stout buxom female, in a puce-colored dress of some warm woolen stuff, and cherry ribbons in her cap.

"Is a gentleman—a—Don Juan di Monteiro lodging here ?"

"Yes, sir," returned the woman. "Pray walk in. The Don is even now engaged ; but I am sure he will receive you ; follow me if you please." She led the way up an extremely dark but wide staircase to a landing above, off which two or three doors opened. Knocking at one, and

pausing in vain for an answer, she opened and ushered in Chifferil.

The room was paneled in oak, and contained nothing save massive chairs, a table, and a sideboard of the same description, on which stood some foreign-looking bottles and glasses. The fire had burned low, and the light was scant, although it was but just mid-day. Another door, nearly opposite the first, was partially open, and, again tapping at this, the landlady entered and spoke to some one within. In a few minutes she returned.

"You may enter, sir," she said; and Chifferil entered.

He found himself in a much warmer, lighter, larger room than the ante-chamber. The furniture, indeed, was plain and heavy; but a large fire, one or two skins of bear or tiger on the oaken floor, a cloak and rapier on a chair, a mask and gloves, with strange outlandish pipes lying about, and one or two richly-decorated coffers or small cabinets, gave a comfortable inhabited look to the apartment.

Don Monteiro was lounging in a deep arm-chair, wrapped in a long loose dressing-robe of deep blue, bordered with a curious pattern of various well-blended colors, but strange workmanship, the like of which little Chifferil had never seen before; and he had the sort of observant faculty that would have been invaluable to a man-milliner. Opposite to the Don, his long legs stretched out towards the fire, his long arms resting on the table, his hat on the ground beside him, sat the very man who had just had the duello with Captain Langley. The sight of him made the precise secretary feel rather uncomfortable. His aspect was not indeed very reassuring—a face long and thin enough for the Knight of La Mancha, a large hooked nose, a wide mouth, with a deep scar extending from one corner almost to the right ear, stern, sunken, glittering dark eyes, looking like caverns under their heavy shaggy brows—and yet, withal, a certain expression of grim humor over all.

Monteiro rose courteously to greet Chifferil with a pleasant smile.

"What an admirably punctual fellow you are," he said;

"and that too when you are by no means your own master."

"Perhaps 'tis because I am compelled to be so very punctual on the one side that I keep such good time on the other," said the secretary, laying aside his hat and cloak, taking the seat offered him near the fire and rubbing his thin hands.

"This," said Monteiro, waving his hand with a kind of respectful gravity towards his other visitor, "is my good friend Don Hyacinth D'Arcy. I did not think of your meeting to-day; but I am glad you have, for he is, like ourselves, willing to devote himself to the service of Lord Langdale's daughter."

"Indeed!" said Chifferil, with a slight cough; "I'm sure I am much gratified to make the gentleman's acquaintance."

"Sir, your most obedient," returned D'Arcy, gathering up his long limbs as he rose and made a bow.

"You would have scarce met this morning," resumed Monteiro, laughing, "had not my peppery friend paused on his road here to indulge his inveterate love of fighting, and exceeded that strict punctuality you so admirably observe."

"It took me but a bare ten minutes to give a lesson to a very smart young gentleman in the noble art of fencing."

"D'Arcy, my friend, I will take it as a personal favor if you will keep out of broils for a month."

"A month, noble Captain! that is a long spell."

"Yes, a whole month!"

"I should imagine the gallant gentleman was indeed an adept," said Chifferil, with a complimentary smirk. "He made the young Captain's sword fly from his grasp as if by the touch of a necromancer."

"Captain! what Captain?" cried Monteiro, looking up with surprise. "Were you present, Chifferil?"

"Yes, sir; by mere accident, walking here through the Haymarket. This gentleman's antagonist was no less than Captain Langley."

"Begad! he has a mighty nate notion of fence," said D'Arcy gravely.

"This is curious," said Monteiro; "that accident should have pitted you against the son of the usurper—the man on whom he would bestow the young Baroness."

"Ye don't tell me so," cried D'Arcy, with much animation. "Be the powers, if I had known that I'd have let daylight into him!"

"Better not," said Monteiro, with an air of calm reflection; "you might possibly have let in a little too much! and I do not want unnecessary bloodshed. Now, D'Arcy, you can tell us what you had begun when Master Chifferil came in. I will answer for his fidelity."

D'Arcy turned in his seat and contemplated Chifferil in a somewhat appalling manner for a minute or two in silence, and then said in a tone of grave approbation, "I thought you were of the right sort the night I seen ye rattlin' the tay-cup at Lamb's. Ye didn't see me, but I see more than most—"

"What! do you recognize me," cried Chifferil, evidently discomfited.

"You were a bird of too different a feather from the rest not to be noticed," returned D'Arcy carelessly.

"Come, come," said Monteiro, with some impatience; "you can trust each other, so do not lose time; your news, D'Arcy, your news?"

"Well, Excellency, there's not much; the grand plot hangs fire for want of ammunition. That blethering brute Morley pretends he is in communication with the young lady, and waits her signal to carry her off."

"The lying hound!" cried Monteiro. "His audacity makes one laugh."

"Elliott and Stephens and the others they believe him, and I seem to do the same, but I see he is dashed by something. I fancy he don't like to meddle with her while she is with Lady Helmsford; and, besides, he has no funds."

"Will you be so considerate as to enlighten my ignorance?" said Chifferil imploringly, as he fidgeted on the edge of his chair with nervous curiosity.

"The key of the riddle is, shortly, this," returned Monteiro. "It seems a gang of these desperadoes have got

scent that some document exists by which the young Baroness may be restored to her rights, and Morley declares he is the man that substituted himself for the bridegroom at yonder mysterious marriage, so he has engaged a choice party, our friend here and others," with a wave of the hand to D'Arcy, "to assist him in carrying off the bride. The attempt was to have been made as the party traveled up from Langdale, but it seems the enterprising Morley had not very correct information, and the lady was safely lodged in Lady Helmsford's house before he was well aware they had left the country. Now fresh difficulties arise. Mistress Langley is so well guarded, and the dog's pockets are so low, he can do nothing."

"I myself think he is inclined to back out of the undertaking, but doesn't like to say so, and tells us a cock and a bull story about waiting for notice of the young lady's own wishes."

"How mean you?" cried poor little Chifferil, starting from his seat in his terror and distress, as the comprehension of this plot grew upon him. "One of those foul knaves I saw at Lamb's carry off fair gentle Mistress Langley? Oh, sir! Spaniard or whatever you may be, you, sure, are too much of a Christian to permit this!"

Monteiro looked at him curiously. "I see you are stanch, Chifferil," he said. "Make your mind easy, not a hair of her head shall be touched."

"Be the powers, no!" growled D'Arcy. "There will be wigs on the green first."

"More," added Monteiro. "It shall go hard but I will keep even from passing fear."

"Would it not be best to warn my lady?" asked Chifferil anxiously. "She is somewhat kittle to deal with, but she would let no one touch her niece, unless indeed—" Chifferil paused abruptly.

Monteiro noticed the pause, and turned an earnest questioning look upon him. "Rest tranquil," he said. "My trusty friend here will keep me informed of all that goes on; and you, Chifferil, will let me know all that passes at Lady Helmsford's. I think amongst us we shall

be able to guard the heiress of Langdale from harm till she can claim her own."

"The marvel to me," said Chifferil, who had resumed his seat, "is, how any great hulking fellow, as most of those at Lamb's seemed to be, could manage to get into that slim young Captain's clothes. Mistress Dorothy tells me he forced the Captain to change clothes with him."

"'Tis very hard to get at the truth of the matter," replied Monteiro. "All our task is to save the young lady from the disastrous consequences which might arise from this extraordinary marriage. "You see, if any villain carried her off under the pretext of being her husband, he could not be punished, for she is certainly wed; and it seems no one knows who the bridegroom is, not even the bride. Faith, it is most strange."

"Will the excellent Don Hyacinth (I think your honor called him) excuse me, but I have a matter for your private ear," said Chifferil, with extreme and cautious politeness. "And I am somewhat pressed for time. My lady ordered me to attend Mistress Langley, who with much entreaty hath obtained permission from the Countess to take a little exercise on the Mall this afternoon with her woman, and the hour is now nigh."

"To walk abroad! this is imprudent," cried Monteiro, with some uneasiness. "D'Arcy, have you breakfasted?"

"So long ago, Excellency, that I begin to think of my dinner."

Monteiro started from his seat and called aloud, "Victor." An unmistakably French valet, his hair in papers, came swiftly at the summons. "Take this gentleman, Victor, and see that he has refreshment—dinner, wine, all that he needs," said Monteiro in French. It was evident from his brightening countenance that D'Arcy understood the drift of the speech.

"Go, amigo! stow away as much provision as you conveniently can in the shortest time, and then you must away to the Mall. Watch for Master Chifferil; notice the lady with him, and be ready to aid him and her in case of need. Stay. I shall probably pass that way myself, why should I not—" Monteiro paused abruptly, and

seemed lost in thought for a moment ; then exclaiming, "Go !" waved the valet and D'Arcy from the room.

"Now," he exclaimed quickly, "your private business, good Chifferil ?"

"To deliver this," he replied, drawing a letter from his pocket, "and to receive your answer ; had it not been for this missive, I should have been less punctual."

Don Juan seized the perfumed delicate paper, and, tearing it open, glanced at the contents ; then, we regret to say, threw it across the table with an impatient oath.

"'Tis the Devil's own coil," he said in an irritable manner, and sat thinking for a few minutes. "How the consequences of a man's folly or weakness are sure to pursue him !" he exclaimed at length ; and, rising, he again took up the letter, reperused it, and drawing forth writing materials from a cabinet, he rapidly traced some lines, folded and directed the paper : committing the letter he had just written to Chifferil, and the one he had received to the flames. "Now tell me," he said, drawing his chair close to the secretary's, and speaking in a low tone, "what doubt crossed your mind just now when, speaking of Lady Helmsford's care for her niece, you added 'unless,' and hesitated ? Surely, as a woman, she must wish to shelter so fair and helpless a creature from harm ?"

"Indeed, sir, I trust you much, or I would not say this ; in some things my lady is—well, a trifle cruel. I know she hated Lord Langdale ; they say for preferring her younger sister to herself. I do not think she loves Mistress Maud ; though 'tis enough to melt the stoniest heart to see how that sweet young lady strives to win her love ! and my lady has her times of relenting ; but, respected sir, if I might offer my humble counsel, I would say, should you walk in the Mall this afternoon, do not join the young lady and Mistress Dorothy ; it might be noticed, it might—" The good little secretary's words died nervously away as he watched the heavy frown gather on Monteiro's brow.

"But I will !" cried that gentleman, laying his hand somewhat heavily on Chifferil's shoulder. "If a dozen

fiends, male and female, stood in the way, I will ! Why should I not ? ”

“ Oh, as your worship pleases ; only I thought—only I feared— ”

“ Cheer up, man,” said Monteiro, rising, his brow clearing and a pleasant smile lighting up his countenance. “ There is more to hope than to fear ; every day that passes brings us nearer the deliverance I seek for my Lady Maud ; but also, I grant, makes the dangers for her more dangerous : of these the worst is John Langley and his son. Now, good Chifferil, begone ! I must dress and go forth.”

CHAPTER X.

THE long imprisonment, first in Langley’s residence, and then in her aunt’s, had affected Maud much. She had been more used to free air and exercise than the generality of young ladies at the period of this tale, and she now pined for a little liberty. The morning after the levee her aunt, being in unusual good temper, had invited her niece to breakfast, and abused Harold Langley in no measured terms ; nevertheless informing her dismayed listener that, if the worst came to the worst, it would be better to marry him than sink into a *dame de compagnie*, “ like Sparrow,” concluded the Countess ; “ for, of course, I may marry myself—it is not at all improbable ; and then you could not expect me to provide for you.”

“ Indeed, I do not, dear aunt,” returned Maud, smiling ; and, prompted by her sincere admiration, she added, “ I am sure you are fair enough to be sought by many ; and I hope you will wed happily some one who will be brighter and more debonair than an Englishman *pur sang*.” Maud spoke archly, for her aunt’s words, coupled with what she had herself noticed, convinced her that Lady Helmsford had agreed to marry the Spaniard.

The Countess looked up quickly, but Maud’s expres-

sion told her she spoke in perfectly good faith ; so with unwonted graciousness she replied. " You are a silly chit to form any conjectures." Yet the conjecture pleased Lady Helmsford.

" What you should do with Dorothy and myself, sweet Countess," resumed Maud, " is to send us both back to France—back to my good dear Madame Wandesforde. It never seemed to cost anything to live there, and I can embroider and mend lace ; and help myself perhaps thus."

" My niece, Lord Langdale's daughter, work for her bread ! What a preposterous idea ! " cried my lady.

" Alas ! madam, Lord Langdale's daughter must eat ; but think of my return to France as possible, dear aunt, and perhaps it will become so."

" Foolish child, there is a better destiny in store for you. Maud, do you know I believe you are at this moment Baroness Langdale ? Does that not move you ? "

" Not much, madam."

" I am certain your father's attainder was reversed : hence the desire of John Langley to wed you to his son. Trust me he knows your rights ! "

" Well, if he will set me free, and give me wherewithal to live, however humbly, where I was once so happy, he may take my rights."

" I did not think you could be so tame and spiritless, Maud," cried the Countess contemptuously.

" I am ! I have suffered so much—so much ! but there is one favor you might grant me, my aunt."

" What is it ? "

" Give me leave to walk out. With Dorothy, and in my hood, I should be safe and unnoticed enough. It is so bright and mild to-day."

The Countess demurred ; but being for sundry reasons in a good mood, and Maud warmly pressing her prayer, she at length acceded. With great delight the pretty prisoner flew to her humble friend.

" Dorothy, dear Dorothy, set forth my hood and warm muffler. My aunt says we may walk forth to-day about

one. When Master Chifferil returns from some errand, and can go with us into the Mall, dear Dorothy."

"Eh, my bird! I am glad, for it is weary work being mewed up here. I will go and fetch your thicker shoes; they are in one of the mails in my chamber."

Dorothy accordingly trotted off, and Maud went into her bedroom, which was within her small study or sitting-room, to don a warmer skirt than what she wore. Then remembering she had left a favorite fan in the outer apartment, she thought she would lay it safe in a drawer before she went out. It was not where she thought she had seen it, but lying on the spinnet on which she had been playing before going to breakfast with her aunt, and which helped to while away many moments that would otherwise have hung heavily. The fan was partly open, and on seeking to close it something hindered her. She looked, and saw a small folded paper slipped between the sticks of the fan. She withdrew and unfolded it. It was covered with small square characters, more like printing than writing. After a moment's bewilderment Maud read as follows:

"MADAM,—He who ventured to usurp your bridegroom's place implores you to trust him yet awhile. Hold still to the marriage, and on the faith of a gentleman it shall in no way hamper you when you no longer need a shield. For your own sake, for mine, keep this communication a secret, and believe ever in the devotion of your husband."

Twice did Maud read this through before her great astonishment permitted her thoroughly to understand its sense. The effect the mysterious billet produced was bewildering. How did it come there? Her fan had lain on the table she was certain when she had been in the room a few minutes before; the door had been open, and she had heard no sound of any one entering. It was most mysterious, and gave her a strange creepy sensation of being wrapped round by some shadowy guardianship *which alarmed more than it assured her.*

She read the lines over again, and trembled with a sensation which was not all horror at the idea of her unknown husband. Would he indeed prove a faithful friend, or would he be a self-interested persecutor? Whoever and whatever he was, he could not be so abhorrent as Harold, from whom he had saved her, and she would certainly obey his injunction so far as for the present to cling to her marriage as to a shield.

But how could this mysterious man have found means to transmit a billet to her in her aunt's strictly-ordered household? Certainly it must be kept a secret, or her aunt would raze the house down, but to Dorothy she must speak; the secret all to herself was more than she could bear. Ah! what straits was she in! none could deliver her save one. The poor young creature sank on her knees and prayed fervently for guidance and protection. She was still in an attitude of devotion when Dorothy returned with the shoes she sought in her hand. She stopped in respectful silence, but with a look of surprise. Maud instantly arose.

"Come with me, Dorothy," she said in a suppressed tone, and drew her into the bed-chamber, closing the door with much precaution. "Sit there, dear Dorothy," she whispered, drawing a chair into the window, and then kneeling down beside her humble friend; "promise me, Dorothy, that you will never breathe a word of what I am going to tell you."

"Me? Oh, never, my darling!"

"To no one?"

"Never shall it cross my lips."

"Then Dorothy do not scream or call out. Read that; I found it between the sticks of my fan."

With considerable help from her mistress Dorothy obeyed, Maud having passed one arm through hers, and holding the letter in the other hand. The moment they reached the word "husband" Dorothy's mouth opened, and Maud instantly dropped the paper and clapped her hand upon it. "Your promise, good nurse!"

"The villain!" exclaimed Dorothy in a vehement whisper. "How? what next? we will not venture to sleep

in our beds ! Why, dear lamb, he must be Satan himself, to get a billet introduced into *this* house ! Now who was the messenger ? Truscott, the second footman ? he is too timorsome a chap ; or Betty ? no—her fingers are too clumsy to slip it in between your fan sticks. Could it be Master Chifferil ? ”

“ My aunt’s trusted secretary ? Impossible ! How could you think of him ? ”

“ Because he is a quare little fellow ; but somehow he seems to have known my lord your father, and to have loved him well. This he tells me secretly—for he is vastly polite—and has once and again invited me to take a dish of tea in his private sitting-room, which has as fine a plenishing as would make poor dear Madame Wandesforde’s empty saloon look like a palace was it there ; and—but I’ll tell you by-and-by. Dear heart ! we must to my lady at once. I almost fear to stir.”

“ Dorothy,” said her mistress, starting to her feet and speaking with an air of authority marvelous in one so young, “ did I not say no word of this was to be breathed to mortal ? This gentleman means me well. See, he says the marriage shall not hamper me. He, it seems to me, seeks only to save me from John Langley. Ah ! there lies my real danger. I cannot tell why it is, Dorothy, but I *do* trust this gentleman. There was something in his look, dimly as I perceived it, that reminded me of my father.”

“ Ah ! my darlin’, what witchcraft is this. Trust me, he only wants to secure the heiress of Langdale, for you *are* the heiress, from what Master Chifferil says, I’m sure.”

“ There is perhaps some truth in the tale,” said Maud thoughtfully.

“ Ay, is there ! so come—come to my lady at once ; she is not gone out yet—she will circumvent the biggest blackguard amongst them.”

“ No, Dorothy ! nothing will tempt me to disobey the injunction of this letter, and I will send you from me and never see your face again if you dare—if you are so base as to betray what I have confided to you. Do not make *me miserable, Dorothy.*”

"Well, well! there! Sure I wouldn't vex you for my life, but if mischief comes of it won't I be massacred with abuse."

"But no harm can come—I do not want really to marry this gentleman." Maud laughed and blushed. "It does not seem he wants to marry me. I only want to keep free and quiet till something which this gentleman evidently looks to as likely to be a deliverance occurs. Meantime I may win upon my aunt, and at any rate she will not for very shame send me back to John Langley."

"I suppose so—I suppose so," said Dorothy dejectedly; "anyhow you must don your cloak, for if my lady says we are to go out, out we must go."

"Dorothy," asked Maud thoughtfully, "why do you think Master Chifferil believes that I am Baroness Langdale?"

"Core of my heart," cried the waiting-woman, with much glee, "he has of his own free will given me six gold pieces, to be repaid when you receive the rents of Langdale. He says he lends them for love of my lord! but I am sure if his love is great, his belief must be a deal greater, or he would never trust me. Now there is *my* secret. If I have money, that's for us both; and my heart has been as light as a cricket since I felt there wasn't room for the devil to dance in my pocket."

"I doubt if you should take this, Dorothy?"

"Ah, honeybird! you keep your secret and I'll keep mine. When you come into your own you'll pay him back with interest."

"Indeed will I, dear good nurse; and this gentleman too. If he is, as you say, a needy adventurer, may I not reward him for his services and send him away? Strange to speak thus of my 'husband.'"

"Your husband! never name him so. Faith he will not readily let you go."

Having carefully burned the billet of her unknown bridegroom, Maud, though still trembling with the fear and excitement it had caused, completed her outdoor costume, and sent to inquire if Lady Helmsford wished to see her before she set forth.

Her ladyship, however, had already gone out in her chair to attend the Princess of Wales's morning reception, for to her court in Leicester House all of beauty and fashion then attached themselves. Mistress Letitia Sparrow was the bearer of this intelligence, and presented herself also in outdoor garb.

"My Lady Helmsford," she said, with her usual smiling politeness, "had imposed upon her the agreeable task of accompanying the charming Mistress Langley in her proposed promenade, and she could take her woman or not as she thought fit. Master Chifferil would also escort them, and two of her ladyship's footmen follow after."

"In truth we shall be a small army," said Maud, laughing, but feeling the charm of the excursion gone when it necessitated so cumbrous an array. "Surely my good aunt is over careful."

"Such is her will," returned Mistress Letitia, "let us descend."

In the hall they found Chifferil, his large wig even more carefully curled and powdered than usual; also the attendant lackeys, armed with long staffs; and over the large fire which warmed the entrance cowered the little negro.

Chifferil, who was standing hat in hand beside the fire in front of a large chair, bowed when Maud stepped from the stairs on the pathway of crimson carpet laid across the gray-and-black marble pavement of the hall. The black boy grinned an acknowledgment. As the party passed him Chifferil uttered a little speech which he had composed for the occasion. "He was," he said, "deeply honored by being permitted to form the escort of a noble young lady so justly dear to them all. It was not for him to intrude, he would therefore follow with the excellent Mistress Dorothy." So saying he stepped forward in a dignified manner, but, alas! left his wig behind him, attached to the fender by a long piece of twine which had been ingeniously knotted to his *queue*.

Chifferil's long uneven pate, destitute of hair, stood *confessed*, and he himself, marvelously altered by the loss

of all the dignity which went with the wig, looked like a little, eager, wizened lunatic.

"Look now! if that isn't his work may I never drink another dish of tay," cried Dorothy indignantly, pointing to Gomez, who had suddenly assumed a look of preternatural gravity, and seizing the twine with both her strong hands she snapped it and replaced the wig on its owner's head with an energetic sympathy that sent it over his eyes.

"You are an ill-conditioned ill-conducted ape," said the little secretary, with solemn disapprobation. "I shall myself inform my lady of your misdemeanor."

"It wasn't me at all, Massa Chifferil," cried the imp; "'twas Tom dere—see him laugh hard as ever he can!"

"You little lying rascal!" muttered the man. "Don't believe him, Master Chifferil," he continued aloud, "he did it himself."

"If you see me why for no tell massa?" chuckled Gomez.

"You ought to have your little black soul flogged out of you," cried the footman.

Gomez made a grimace at him.

"You should indeed be punished," said Maud gravely. "But come, Mistress Sparrow, we shall lose the sunshine."

It was like a draught of new life to Maud when she stepped into the open air, and, following the guidance of the companion, found herself in what was then, as now, the famous Mall of St. James's.

It was a lovely winter's day. Although the frost was severe, the absence of wind and a bright sun made the temperature agreeable. The branches of the trees, beautiful and jeweled by their sparkling vesture; the hard smooth ground; the clear exhilarating atmosphere—made exercise a delight; and the newness of everything was a source of the keenest pleasure to Maud. It was not exactly the fashionable hour, still numbers of well-dressed persons were about. The large hats of the humbler women; the rich sacques and lace-trimmed hoods of the great ladies; the liveries of the servants who attended

them ; the varied aspect of the gentlemen in their wide-skirted coats, abundant lace, and braveries of all descriptions—all were strange to her. In France she had never seen anything grander than a state visit of some French noble to the rather decayed and melancholy Court of St. Germain ; and even that was amongst her oldest memories. But the animation, the wealth and comfort which all the surroundings of the scene in which she found herself indicated, greatly surprised and interested her. She would have much preferred viewing it alone with Dorothy, but Mistress Sparrow was not without her uses ; she could explain and account for much which would have puzzled both herself and her faithful friend.

"My lady strictly charged me not to venture amid yon crowd that gathers round the skaters on Rosamond's pool—'tis there most of the folks are hurrying ; let us turn and walk up towards the old Mulberry Gardens, where his Grace of Buckingham's new house stands."

"As you will," said Maud ; "'tis all delightful to me."

"But you have surely seen Versailles and the Tuileries ? and we have nothing so fine here," returned Mistress Sparrow.

"I have seen the Tuileries—not Versailles ; but there do not seem to be nearly so many people nor such rich attire in France. Then, dear Mistress Sparrow, I lived ever in the old Château Chantlaire, and saw nothing."

"Yet you wish to return. Well, I do not wonder at it ; for as I was once on the point of telling you—"

Whereupon Mistress Sparrow plunged into a history of her early attachment to a French cavalier who had been killed while fighting for somebody somewhere. The party had nearly reached Buckingham House when her attention was attracted by some passing celebrity, and, turning to look after him, she exclaimed, in alarm :

"Master Chifferil, those men have disappeared ; I can see no sign of them."

The missing attendants had in fact slipped away to have a peep at the skating, and, for the moment, were *nowhere to be seen*.

"I shall go in search of the careless fellows," exclaimed the secretary, making as if to turn back.

"Oh, gracious powers, no, good Master Chifferil," cried Mistress Sparrow. "What, leave us three women alone! and see there is a most suspicious-looking desperado lounging along by the rails near the water. We will all turn together, and see if we cannot meet them."

The suspicious individual pointed out was a tall, gaunt, soldierly-looking man in a rusty red suit and a smart feathered hat.

"Ahem! I see nought objectionable in yon fellow," said Chifferil, recognizing him; "but we will turn as you propose, if Mistress Langley so pleases."

Maud was ready to walk in any direction.

"How does this please you, Dorothy?" she asked.

"Oh, right well, madam; 'tis a grand place. I should not mind if you had a house of your own close by. 'Tis ever so much gayer than all I have ever seen before."

The upper part of the Mall was less crowded than where they had entered upon it; and as they retraced their steps they observed a gentleman advancing to meet them—a gentleman in a black suit laced with gold, a broad sword belt over the right shoulder, and a real fighting sword depending therefrom; high boots and a hat gold laced and fringed with feathers completed his costume.

"Sure," exclaimed Mistress Sparrow in some perturbation, "'tis no other than the Don himself—now this is unfortunate."

It was Don Juan di Monteiro who came straight towards them, and, raising his hat with courtly grace, greeted Maud and her companions.

"Where is the beautiful Countess?" he asked, after they had exchanged ceremonious salutations.

"My aunt has gone to attend the Princess's reception."

"Where, sir, I understood you were to be presented," simpered Letitia.

"There was a talk of it," said Monteiro carelessly, "but I have been warned to steer clear of Leicester House if I expect favor at St. James's. If you are going down

the Park permit me to join you. You have but a slender escort considering the value of the convoy."

So saying, and while listening politely to Mistress Sparrow's elaborate explanation of the footmen's disappearance, Monteiro managed to place himself between Maud and the *dame de compagnie*.

"'Tis a gay scene, Mademoiselle, and better than being mewed up in Great Queen Street," he said, looking at her with eyes half closed so as to veil their expression. "Madame la Comtesse has told me of your escape; am I indiscreet in referring to it?"

"O no," replied Maud, with a bright smile; "every one knows everything concerning me—at least nearly everything. My life has hitherto been so simple, I feel amazed to find anything like difficulty or danger in it."

"Your life ought to be pure and fair, like yourself," said the Spaniard, with a slight sigh. "I must say I marvel that your kinsman—I mean the young one—is not man enough to take sides with you against his father, though I confess 'twould be no small exercise of virtue."

"You are too partial, sir; but Captain Langley would be less bitter against me were it not for his father. I fear me I forget my aunt's directions. Let us talk of something else."

"I was the original transgressor," said the Don, smiling with a peculiarly soft caressing expression. "So pardon me."

Here Mistress Sparrow, who did not at all like being left out of the conversation, exclaimed, "Don't you find this climate somewhat biting, Monsieur, after the more sunny regions of Spain?"

"I have never resided very long in Spain," he returned, "though I have frequently visited the country; but I find the climate of England more invigorating than chilling."

"Is it not unusual for a foreigner to like this land so well?" asked Maud.

"I do not call myself a foreigner exactly," replied Monteiro in French; "and I am envious of the name of Englishman."

"*I too fancied I loved England much till I came here,*"

answered Maud. "Now I greatly long to return to my old home in France—if it still exists—for I have never had any tidings since I left, nor have I been permitted to write."

"That was cruel," returned Monteiro, "particularly to those you left behind. Tell me what charm had your life in France that you remember it so fondly?"

"The charm of home and safety, which I have never known since. Ah! Monsieur di Monteiro, I was absolutely sinful in my longings for change—in my weariness of the peaceful quiet in that old château. I lived with such a kind grave lady, who was never angry and never hurried. I had books and work and endless occupation; and a great wide garden where I could roam at will, without all this wearisome following," waving her hand towards Mistress Sparrow, then scolding the two footmen, who had reappeared; "and dear little children to play with, belonging to a widowed French lady who lived in the rooms over us. Then my dear father used to come at times like sunshine, and I had Dorothy; and I was so free! Now I have desolation."

To pour out her heart in French was too great a temptation. The grave sympathy and absorbed attention of her listener led her on. She could not, and did not try to account for her readiness to confide so readily in this stranger. But the simplicity and earnestness of his speech and manner, contrasted with the flowery affectations of all the other men who surrounded her aunt, drew her to him unconsciously but powerfully.

"Yet," returned Monteiro, "it was a homely house for Lord Langdale's daughter."

"How sweet was the homeliness," exclaimed Maud. "Ah, sir, you are a dear friend of my aunt; she would no doubt grant much to you. Intercede for me! pray her to send me back to France. I want to live my own life—not to be a shuttlecock between contending players whose game I cannot understand."

Poor Maud thought she had made a happy hit in thus endeavoring to secure the interest of Lady Helmsford's favorite.

"Sweet Mistress Langley," returned Monteiro, with much seriousness, and in English, "you are under a mistake; the Countess of Helmsford was gracious enough to notice me in Paris because she likes novelty. She is hospitable to me here because she is courteous to strangers, but I am no more to her than she is to me. I dare not presume to intrude myself in her councils, or offer even an opinion on her affairs, otherwise I should in this, as in all things, be at your service."

Maud's large blue eyes turned on him with a look of bewildered surprise. Of all those she had met since parting with her beloved protectress, none had seemed to her so deserving of belief as this mysterious Spaniard who always spoke to her with a grave respect, different from the jovial ease of his manner to others. And yet how could she doubt the evidence of her own eyes—the meaning of Mistress Sparrow's innuendoes? She had begun to think that, in spite of some disparity of years, the Countess intended to marry Monteiro; and now he seriously disclaimed any title to interest or influence with her. It was more than she could understand.

"I must believe you, I suppose," she said slowly.

"You may; I speak truth," returned the Don impressively.

"My dear young lady," exclaimed Mistress Sparrow, who had returned from catechizing the footmen, "do you not think you have prolonged your promenade sufficiently?"

"No, indeed, good Mistress Sparrow," said Maud. "Think how long I have been a prisoner! one more turn I pray you—so far as yonder mansion."

"You must not deny Mistress Langley's request," observed Monteiro, "nor to me the honor of accompanying you."

"Indeed, sir," said Mistress Letitia, with a curtsy and a simper, "I am not so hard-hearted; but, in return, may I pray you to speak English? I am not now so familiar with the French tongue as, alas! I once was; and besides, a gallant gentleman will understand how

great a charge the guardianship of a young lady like Mistress Langley must be ; therefore—”

“You would like to hear all that is addressed to her by those fortunate cavaliers to whom she deigns to speak,” put in Monteiro, laughing as she hesitated. “’Tis but natural, so we will e’en grant each other’s petition.”

The remainder of the promenade was very agreeable, despite Maud’s doubts. Don Juan talked well and freely of traveling and the wonders of distant lands, of which he appeared to have seen much ; Mistress Sparrow frequently interrupting with notes of interrogation and admiration, while Maud from time to time made observations in her soft low tones, which always seemed to charm Monteiro, and incite him to fuller and warmer descriptions.

At length they separated, Monteiro accompanying them to the entrance of St. James’s Square and then returning to the Park, where, for some time, he walked to and fro in one of the more secluded parts—rapidly—restlessly.

This pale fair girl was indeed the victim of a cruel fate ! Almost all the women he had known and toyed with, and fancied and forgotten, were at the best but goodnatured or easy tempered ; while the most of them were too whimsical to permit of much reliance, either on their goodnature or their easy temper ; and all would have found in rank—a brilliant equipage, jewels, finery—a consolation for most sentimental grievances. Here, however, was metal, not only more attractive, but purer, finer, and of a truer ring. No vulgar show, no commonplace passion, could satisfy Maud Langley’s soul or win her. No ; the success of John Langley’s schemes meant worse than death to her—a life-long agony, *if* she lived.

“How sweet and fair and noble she is,” thought the fiery Spaniard as he walked along near the water where the merry monarch was wont to feed his feathered favorites.

“God ! what a difference between her life and mine. And yet—and yet she inclines to trust me, to seek my help. Ay, she shall have it. Before that accursed bound

destroys her life I'll take his and his son's too ; it would be a simple act of duty. And she yearns for that gloomy shattered home in France, when scarce any cage could be lovely enough for so beauteous a bird. Yes, I will go to old Pantaloon's gathering. She asked me at parting why I refused Lord Chedworth's entertainment. I will go. If she will but trust me, if I can but prove—"

"How long is your Excellency going to walk the deck there this chill evening?" asked the tall man with the crimson suit whose doubtful seeming had alarmed Mistress Sparrow.

He had for some time been watching Monteiro's rapid pacing to and fro, and now approached him.

"Begone!" was the courteous reply. "Do not intrude yourself on my meditations."

"All right, my noble Captain, but the shades of night are beginning to gather, and this is not too safe a place they say when day is done."

"Well, well, I'll away," said Monteiro, rousing himself; "I cannot afford to come to harm yet, D'Arcy; I have work to do. Come, my brave old comrade, let's be careful of our precious skins for the next few weeks. After that, perhaps adieu to old England for ever!"

"What, after striving so hard to come here and turn Englishman?" cried D'Arcy.

"It is impossible to say what side of the dice fortune may turn up; meantime let's get into Pall Mall, find a coach, and drive to Lamb's. I needs must see Robiliard."

CHAPTER XI.

THE Countess of Helmsford had already returned from the royal reception when Maud and her escort reached home. She was, they were informed, somewhat indisposed, and desired that Mistress Sparrow should be sent to her immediately on her entrance. Something in poor *Letitia's* expression, on the receipt of this command,

suggested to Maud that her anticipations were not agreeable.

"I must not suppress the fact that our distinguished acquaintance, Don Juan di Monteiro, joined us in the Park," she whispered before obeying the summons.

"Wherefore should you?" asked Maud in some surprise. "I am surely permitted to converse with those to whom my aunt introduces me."

"No doubt, no doubt," whispered Letitia hastily; "but 'tis as well we tell the same tale;" and she ran quickly upstairs.

Maud looked after her, with an unpleasant astonishment, and, mounting to her own apartments, laid aside her walking dress, and, in spite of the agitation which she had suffered in the morning, enjoyed the slight feeling of fatigue which her unusual exercise produced, also the variety of talking over what they had seen with Dorothy.

But more than this did the young orphan like the hour of quiet which followed their dinner, which was served soon after their return (for Maud had never yet dined, save by invitation, with Lady Helmsford).

Good Dorothy was wont to retire after dinner to the inner chamber—to read, she said, the evening prayers, which she preferred to do in private, but Maud shrewdly suspected that her devotions were paid to the soothing god of sleep.

Then alone, in the gathering twilight, by the red glow of the fire, did Maud Langley brood over the letter she had that day so mysteriously received. With all her thoughts turned inward, she recalled the vivid yet confused memories of the wedding-day at Langdale. Who could the bridegroom be? When should she see him? What would he be like? He was a friend—of that she felt sure, because he was an enemy of the Langleys. Half unconsciously to herself, she had grown to look upon her unknown husband as a deliverer, but when would he show himself? Would he prove to be some high-minded gentleman whom she could indeed love and look up to and pass her life with? How she wished he might be such a one. The interest of these speculations nearly

banished from her mind the sort of painful surprise with which she had listened to Monteiro's solemn declaration that he was no more than a common acquaintance to Lady Helmsford, and also a strange feeling, half attraction, half distrust, that always affected her when she met his eyes. She liked him and she did not, but such doubts vanished before the absorbing interest that hung round her husband. "Her husband!" the very word was enough to raise a hundred contradictory emotions in a young girl's heart, chief of which was an intense longing that he might be good and kind, and that with him she might find real protection.

"Alone and in the dark!" said Lady Helmsford's voice close to her. The Countess had entered softly and unperceived, having paused for a few moments to mark how deeply her niece was wrapped in thought.

"My aunt! I did not hear you," cried Maud, starting up, her heart beating fast at this sudden recall to reality.

"No! indeed! Now I wonder where your thoughts were? But of course you will not tell me."

Maud blushed and was silent for a moment; and then, with the generous hope of winning her aunt's confidence and liking, exclaimed:

"Yes, madam, I will, even if you disapprove, for you must own it is but natural that I should often think of that—that strange marriage and the gentleman who took Harold's place."

"Indeed!" returned Lady Helmsford in a peculiar tone. "Why do you always speak of that adventurer as 'a gentleman'?" He most probably was some robber or smuggler (they say the coast near Langdale is infested with such), bribed to spite your guardian. It was scarce the act of a gentleman."

"And yet he is, dear aunt. I cannot say why I feel it, but he *is* a gentleman."

"We need not argue the matter," returned the Countess carelessly. "I have something of importance to speak of. Ring for lights."

Maud obeyed, and Lady Helmsford threw herself into a *deep lounging chair* with an air of weariness, preserving

an unbroken silence till her order was obeyed, and Maud then perceived that she did indeed look ill. Her rouge had not been as yet laid on for the evening toilet; her hair was coiled into a knot, and she was in real comfortable dishabille, still no dress could alter the fact that she was a handsome woman. It was the haggard distressed look of her eyes that struck Maud with surprise and pity.

"You are ill—you have been suffering," she exclaimed tenderly, venturing to take her aunt's hand. "Why did you not send for me?"

Lady Helmsford's dark eyes looked eagerly—almost fiercely—into Maud's, as if she would fain have read the very secrets of her heart; then she smiled more softly and kindly than usual.

"You are like your mother, Maud," she said dreamily. "You ought to have been born in a different station. You are a home-bird, scarce fit to fill a great lady's part. You have neither the spirit, nor the wit, nor the hardness it requires."

"I am not ambitious, my aunt," returned Maud, drawing herself up with a haughty look and gesture that became her well; "but I trust God will give me grace to do my duty in whatever station of life He sees fit to allot me."

"Well, child," resumed Lady Helmsford, "it is of that station I have come to speak with you. Your position is doubtful, dangerous, unbecoming. As yet I think the gossips have not had scent of the delicious morsel this Langdale marriage would be to them. When they do, you will not have a rag of reputation left; the sooner this obstacle to your settlement in life is swept away and you are protected by a noble and honorable alliance the better. I do not wish to put any force on your inclinations, nor do I see any advantage in a marriage with the left-hand line of your family, so the sooner you wed some powerful personage the sooner you will be safe from your uncle. Whether he likes it or not, I shall at once take steps to set you free. I have seen my lawyer to-day respecting the necessary measures. No time must be lost."

"But, madam—dear aunt," cried Maud, who had

listened to this speech with a varying color and beating heart, "I am already guarded from John Langley. He dare not take me from you; he cannot force me to go through the marriage ceremony again with his son. Trying and doubtful as my condition is, I would rather bear it awhile and see if this gentleman—my husband, as I must call him—will not reappear as he promised, and set me free."

The Countess drew Maud to her, gently pressing her shoulder till the girl slowly bent her knee beside her.

"Foolish child! you do not dream the daring wickedness of which avaricious and resolute men are capable. Tell me, what do you remember of this man?" And the Countess looked searchingly into her face while she answered:

"In truth scarce anything, save that his eyes had a kindly look that somehow vaguely reminded me of my father."

"Your father! he was a thorough Englishman: fair, florid, gray-eyed. What more? What did he say?"

"Only in a sort of deep whisper, 'Keep faith with me, till I can claim you or release you.'"

"And his voice—was it that of a gentleman?"

"I could not say what it sounded like. I seemed to gather the sense of the words without almost hearing the sound."

"This is the strangest part of all—the impression he seems to have left upon you. Maud, are you weak and fanciful enough to imagine you love this dim ghost of a husband?"

"I cannot tell, madam," returned Maud, blushing deeply even while she spoke calmly and candidly. "If he proves a worthy gentleman—anxious to do me a service for my father's sake—why should I not?"

"And if he turns out a rude swashbuckler, you will find it troublesome and costly to quit you of him."

"Such a one will not seek a portionless demoiselle."

"Ay; but trust me, this man is some adventurer who *knows* you are the heiress of Langdale. Nay more, he *probably holds the pardon*, and only waits some fitting

opportunity to seize you and the estate also. No, Maud ; on Monday my lawyer shall open the preliminaries of a suit in the Ecclesiastical Court."

"So far as the lack of my consent will go to hinder the proceedings, count upon it, madam," returned Maud, with much spirit, and raising her large blue eyes fearlessly to an encounter with her aunt's black ones.

After an instant's silence Lady Helmsford relaxed into an amused smile.

"I think, young lady, I was over quick to decide on your want of spirit. Then you have seen none in all the fair company which gathers round me to drive this dream of yours out of your mind?" and the Countess looked keenly at her.

"None, madam," replied Maud simply, meeting the look with the calmness of truth.

"And this man has never attempted to communicate with you? But no, in *my* household nothing occurs without my knowledge. You are quite sure, Maud, that *no* one has disturbed this fancy of yours," still gazing at her.

"No, madam—in truth none," said Maud, infinitely relieved to find her aunt did not press the first question.

"It is well," observed the Countess, with a slight sigh. "Be watchful, child, of your heart or fancy, or whatever plays us weak women such vile tricks. All our sorrows, all our failures, come from what moralists, like my pleasant breakfast companions, the 'Spectator' and 'Tatler,' term our 'nobler parts.' Look at the enormous power a woman wields over a man she does *not* love, and who loves her! Once give *him* the mastery and you have lost your compass—chaos is come again; you can no longer rule your life; you sink into a degrading slavery from which nothing can release you, save, perhaps, change."

"Yet, madam, when he whom you love loves and respects you in return, life must be very sweet," said Maud, smiling.

"The dream of a novice! Men never value or respect that which they have absolutely won."

"Ah, do not say so," exclaimed the novice imploringly.

"Yes, so it is. Child, there is something about you I could almost love ; be guided by me and I will place you well. Rank and riches are substantial joys ; and many a pleasant morsel of forbidden fruit can be hidden away among their ample draperies."

"Love me then, dear aunt ! do love me ! I only ask to be allowed to love you ;" and Maud kissed her hand.

Lady Helmsford smiled, but withdrew it coldly, as if a little ashamed of her previous softness.

"Sit by me," she said, "I have yet a word or two which will prove my care for you, before I go to dress for the everlasting round from which I cannot escape. That Spanish gentleman, who joined you in the Park to-day—be sparing of your notice to him. He is—well—he is scarce sober enough to be a young lady's cavalier. He led a wild life in Paris. They say he carried off a nun, and fought and gambled and drank hard, and much else unfit for your ears."

"Indeed, madam ; I grieve to hear it," cried Maud with candor, though coloring brightly. "He seemed to me a grave and kindly gentleman. But might not the unhappy nun have been secluded against her will, and his but an act of chivalry to restore her to her friends," added the fair advocate, her Protestant prejudices coming to her aid.

The Countess laughed contemptuously.

"In truth yours is a lively fancy, Mistress Langley, indulge it as you will ; but heed my warning, as few words as civility warrants with Don Juan di Monteiro," concluded Lady Helmsford in her most imperious manner.

"Of course, dear aunt, your word in most things is my law ; only I marvel you permit this gentleman the entree of your house."

"That is my affair ; I can meddle with much you ought not to handle. I may be of use to the young man, and lead him into better courses ; 'tis enough for you to obey."

The Countess spoke angrily, and rose as she spoke.

"It is," said Maud simply.

"I wish you good-evening then," said Lady Helmsford. "To-morrow you must choose your dress for Lord Chedworth's party. While under my protection you must look worthy of it."

And her ladyship swept away with very little show of the love she had half promised.

"Dorothy, are you there, Dorothy?" said Maud, opening the door into her bed-chamber; whereupon the excellent woman nearly fell forward on her face.

"Ah, my bird, to be sure I am, and heard every word. She is a great lady entirely, and knows a power about the men. I declare she means well by you. Now don't be speaking a word to that dark devil of a Spaniard; don't you see my lady wants to guide him in the right road all by herself, and you are not to have a finger in it—mind that now!"

"Dorothy, how can you talk thus? Do you think I care to speak with Monsieur di Monteiro? certainly not. It will be painful to me to exchange a word with him after all these *pourparlers*."

"Well, well, don't pain yourself; and now I'll just go and see if there's any signs of a dish of tea—for I'm that thirsty!"

A few days after this conversation, which gave Maud ample food for thought, business was at its full tide—in those days never very full compared to the high-water mark attained in these later times—in the various departments of his Majesty's Treasury. It was past noon; a dull drizzle had replaced the bright clear frost of the week before. But weather did not much affect the visitors whose business lay with the officials employed in that solid unpretending edifice. Seekers for favors, drivers of hard bargains, men with salable morsels of intelligence and hints of foreign politics came whether it rained or shone; among them, in his own chair—for he avoided the pretension implied by an equipage—came John Langley. He was evidently known, for a porter at once threw

open an inner door and ushered him into a large room where several clerks sat writing at fixed desks. Mr. Langley walked to the upper end, where a grave elderly man, evidently the head of the department, had a chair and desk all to himself near the fire.

"Good-morning, Mr. Langley," said the gentleman, rising. "Can I do any thing for you, sir?"

"I thank you, sir; I am here to see my Lord Sunderland on the part of Lord Berkeley."

"I shall let him know directly," returned the other. "At present Mr. Aislabie is with my lord. 'Tis a—unpleasant weather. Will you look at the paper, Mr. Langley?"

Mr. Langley accepted it, more to avoid conversation than to seek news. Soon the sound of closing doors induced one of the clerks to look through a square of glass at the end of the room.

"Mr. Aislabie's going out, sir," said the young man.

"Oh, very well. Jenkins, go up and say Mr. Langley of the Admiralty waits on his lordship. By appointment, sir?" to Langley.

"By appointment."

In a few minutes the messenger returned and asked Langley to follow him upstairs. Passing through the ante-chamber with a slight civil bow to a secretary who was hard at work amid a mass of papers, Langley was ushered into the great man's presence.

In a large, square, comfortably but by no means luxuriously furnished room, and with his back to the fire, stood Lord Sunderland. A tall handsome man of stately presence, richly dressed in crimson velvet embroidered with gold, and looking graciously down on the plain dark figure which entered out of a magnificent curled periwig. John Langley bowed low, but not too low; with all his faults he possessed a backbone, and to that quality much of his success was due.

"Well, sir, you bring me a note from my Lord Berkeley?"

"I do, my lord; and I am to supplement the information it contains by answering any questions you wish to put."

Lord Sunderland hastily read the letter, and then, seating himself at his writing-table, across which lay his rapier, which he appeared to have laid aside for greater ease, perused the paper more carefully, and, drawing to him pen and paper, said :

"Sit down, my good sir ; a little talk will make this clearer," at once plunged into details respecting the Admiralty and the estimates for the navy, with the jobbing which thereunto, as a matter of course, appertained, that would make the ears of the least democratic and reforming of modern members tingle, and his hair stand on end.

After more than half an hour thus occupied, Lord Sunderland rose and resumed his former position on the hearthrug.

"I am obliged to you, sir," he said after a few minutes' silence. "You have made these matters plain. I congratulate my Lord Berkeley on the qualities of his secretary."

Another pause, during which Langley also rose and bowed, but kept his position beside the writing-table. The silence continuing, Langley broke it by observing :

"Lord Berkeley was good enough to promise his intercession with your lordship for a few moments of your valuable time on a personal topic."

"He *has* asked me to hear you, sir," returned the Minister. "Speak on," glancing at the clock as he said it.

"Your lordship is probably aware that I am commissioned to manage the estate of the late Lord Langdale, who was attainted and fled the country some eight or nine years ago."

"Yes, now you mention it I remember," said Lord Sunderland.

"I find a belief exists among some friends of the family that her late Majesty—influenced no doubt by my Lord Bolingbroke—granted a pardon or reversal of the attainder very shortly before her death, but I have in vain made inquiry for it—it has disappeared if it ever existed."

"Somewhat unusual, Mr. Langley."

"Yes, my lord ; but things were confused on the ar-

rival of his Majesty, and the reins of government were in hands less firm and clean than at present."

Lord Sunderland smiled slightly. "Well, sir?"

"Lord Langdale bequeathed his only child, an orphan daughter, to my guardianship, I presume as a provision for the poor young lady who is left penniless. She is now under my care. I have also, my lord, a son—now a Captain in his Majesty's Guards—and if it be permitted to a parent so to say, a promising young officer. He wishes to wed his cousin, nor would I willingly oppose his choice. My object, therefore, in troubling your lordship is to ascertain what chance there is of the disabilities affecting young Mistress Langley's rights being removed, even if the pardon supposed to have been granted by the late queen is irretrievably lost."

"I understand," returned the Minister. "You wish to secure the Langdale property for your son—it is but natural."

"It is an ungracious task to urge one's own deserts," resumed Langley in his equable, strong, harsh, inflexible voice, which sounded like a species of guarantee for his honesty by its very unpleasantness, "but I must venture to remind your lordship that I was lucky enough to be able to prove my own loyalty, and to do the country some service, owing to my fortunate presence on the south coast, when an attempt was made by some ill-disposed persons to land and foment disturbance, near Rye, about two years ago, when—"

"Yes, yes—I remember it."

"Mr. Walpole, your lordship's predecessor, was good enough to thank me personally; and I need not say that the House of Hanover would have, in myself and my son, devoted adherents."

"Not a bad substitute for the original stock—though if I remember aright the late Lord Langdale was by no means a bitter Jacobite. Foolish fellows these men, who lose their all for so worthless a cause. Well, Mr. Langley, I am not averse to your request; but I must inquire *into this question of the missing pardon*. I have heard *something germane* to the matter lately, which, in the

press of business, has escaped my notice ; your speech has recalled it. I will make inquiries. Believe me I shall be happy if it is any way within my power to befriend so loyal a servant of the crown ;" and the Minister bowed as if the audience was ended.

But John Langley was not to be got rid of so easily. "Your lordship must excuse me ; this succession to the Langdale estates is a matter I have much at heart. What may be the nature of the information which has reached you respecting them ?"

"Odds my life !" cried Lord Sunderland impatiently, "I cannot tell—I know something has been writ me, but nothing much or I should remember. Of this, however, assure yourself, that I am on your side ; for it seems to me a fair and honorable settlement that your son, who, but for a slight difficulty," said the great man pleasantly, "would be heir of Langdale, and the fair lady (I suppose she is fair?), who, but for another difficulty, would be heiress, should unite their difficulties and achieve successful possession. I shall have instant inquiry made and lay the matter before the King in one shape or another. His Majesty returns in four or five weeks. I imagine Mr. Secretary Craggs waits below."

Even John Langley was obliged to make his bow and his exit on this. "In four or five weeks," he muttered to himself as he descended the stair. "She must be Harold's wife before that time. The favor leans to Lord Langdale's daughter, Jacobite and rebel though he was ; these nobles cling to each other marvelously—still they shall one day open their ranks to receive my son."

Re-entering his chair, Mr. Langley was carried over the short space intervening between the Treasury and Wallingford House, and, after a brief interview with the First Lord of the Admiralty, proceeded to his own residence.

His first inquiry was for his son, but Captain Langley had not called that morning.

"Lay another cover at dinner, and, Mathews," to the single man-servant who attended to him indoors, "fetch me a light. I will see if there are a few bottles of But-

gundy left in the cellar. Captain Langley is accustomed to fine wines in the great houses where he is entertained. He must not lack them when he dines at home."

More than an hour elapsed before the expected guest appeared; but John Langley had sufficient employment in re-reading sundry letters, looking over accounts, and making calculations, to prevent it seeming long.

His usual dinner-hour was past, however, when Harold arrived, driving up in a hackney-coach.

"Late as usual, Harold," said his father, as he sauntered in, his pale face, languid air, and depressed expression presenting an unpromising aspect for the discussion his father had planned.

"I am sorry, sir, but it is really unavoidable." Throwing his hat on the sideboard, he sat down by the fire, and stretching out his legs, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, looking a picture of weariness and disgust.

"I fear, Harold, that all is not well with you. Have you been losing at play?"

"No, sir, the cockpit this time; that fellow, Sir Eustace Blount, has the devil's own luck. The bird I backed was within an ace of winning, when—" he rushed into a description of the fortunes of the fight, which would no doubt be as uninteresting to my reader as to his listener, and a good deal more unintelligible.

"And the upshot of all this, Harold, is, I suppose, that you have lost a round sum?"

"I confess I have been hit."

"Hit hard, Harold? what will cover it—two figures?"

"No," returned the prodigal shamelessly; "it is a hundred and seventy this time."

John Langley continued to fold and arrange his papers with an unmoved face.

"Listen to me, Harold," he said very quietly, but with a cold decision in his tone that woke up the young *roué* very effectually. "I have taken my resolution. I shall pay this money for you as I have done before; but take warning, hitherto I have had no object in life save yourself. I am willing to run some risk to give you a great position; if you are capable of exerting some self-con-

trol—of choosing between idiotic pleasures and substantial advancement—prove it now. If not, I shall make the wrench at once, and renounce you. I am young enough to make new ties, and could choose a partner in a higher grade of life than your mother, Harold, though she came of a good City stock. Now do not let us drift into an unpleasant tone of conversation. Your future is in your hands. No words—no protestations, Harold. I mean what I say, show me that you mean obedience.”

He rose and rang.

“Dinner immediately,” said Mr. Langley. Then, with a change of voice and manner, he added, “I have not done a bad day’s work, nor a bad week’s work since I saw you, Harold. It is nigh a week since you supped with me, is it not?”

“Eight days, sir,” returned Harold, considerably struck by his father’s speech and manner. “Then you had accomplished but little.”

“Well, the report after dinner.” This was soon announced, and the operation of eating it considerably refreshed and invigorated Harold, who cheered up sufficiently to repeat some of the gossip and smart sayings of the coffee-house and the green-room, detailing the great mansions where he had been received, and the great ladies by whom he had been graciously noticed. “And to-night,” he wound up, “I am to accompany my Lady Helmsford and dainty Mistress Langley to a select drum at my Lord Chedworth’s—only a few particular stars of the highest fashion are invited.”

“I thought the drum was a woman’s entertainment,” said John Langley, watching impatiently the removing of the dishes and the approach of the moment when he would be alone with his son.

“Tis so in ordinary cases, my dear sir, but on this occasion it is a sort of *petit souper*, to permit my lady and her niece to examine his lordship’s rare china and pictures.”

“Her niece,” quoth John Langley scornfully; “my niece you should say! There, Mathews, leave the wine

beside Captain Langley, I prefer this claret—that will do—you need not wait. Fill your glass, Harold. You seldom tasted finer vintage. Now, my son, I will detail my doings since we met. I have this day spoken with Lord Sunderland—” and he proceeded to recapitulate his conversation in that interview.

“His lordship speaks fair,” observed Harold ; “but how about those queer customers in Lamb’s Court? You had not succeeded in opening communications with them when I last saw you.”

“I have since, and they are a dangerous lot to meddle with ; still the chief among them is not unknown to me. I think I can contrive to make him work with a rope round his neck. I have not given him a hint who I am. He thinks me an agent for some one considerably above myself. I only saw him the night before last at a somewhat villainous inn near Hatton Garden. He is cautious, and will not commit himself as to the amount of knowledge he possesses respecting the marriage. I do not believe he was the impostor himself, but rather his employee ; and there is some scheme afoot for carrying off Maud—so much I can make out ; also that this man is open to the highest bidder. I am making a few inquiries, and I rather think he will turn out to be a certain Morley (he now calls himself Strange), who a couple of years back was taken when endeavoring to break into a nobleman’s house near Kensington—taken with all his tools—and had a fight in which he killed one of the watch and got away. If so, he is our bondsman.”

“A creditable associate. Well, sir, what conclusion have you arrived at?”

“I have not absolutely concluded anything ; but the man is needy and in my grasp, and I shall conclude with him that he shall hire a carriage and horses, necessary ruffians, and all requisites to aid an ardent lover, name unknown, and hold them in readiness at a certain place appointed, to be forthcoming at any moment within the next fifteen days. Maud Langley must be your wife before the King returns, the rest is in your hands ; *I must not appear. You know the going out and the coming in of*

the noble company amid which you live. Lay your plans ; I shall give you a sign by which Master Strange will know you wear a mask, and for ten days or so the unknown bridegroom will have the credit of having carried off his bride ; you, meantime, will be absent on business. When you return the laugh will be on your side, and I shall be greatly displeased by such headstrong imprudence."

"I think I understand the game, sir," returned the son, "and am the more inclined to play it, for I can see Lady Helmsford, with all her smooth civility, does not intend to have me for her nephew-in-law ; and Mistress Maud *endures* me," Harold concluded, with a bitter laugh.

"Then she shall have something more than she dreams of to endure," returned Langley, with an unpleasant look. "We will not allow our plans to be baffled by the sickly fancy of a girl who does not know what is good for her."

"I imagine it grows late," said Harold moodily, "and I have to dress for my Lord Chedworth's entertainment. Why will you not sometimes come out of your shell, sir, and view the great world ?"

"The great world !" echoed Langley, with unutterable scorn ; "the puppet world, the strings of which I, and men like me, pull—no ; I don't wish to mix with fine ladies and maccaronis ; there is no place for me amongst them ; yet they have their uses, they have their uses."

"Then to-morrow," said Harold, rising.

"To-morrow," answered his father, "I will finally arrange all particulars, and you must decide the moment of action."

"By the way, sir, have you discovered any thing respecting that confounded Don Juan di Monteiro ?"

"No ; I have forgotten him. He is nothing to us, let the Countess of Helmsford exalt him as she will."

CHAPTER XII.

EITHER Captain Langley's toilet occupied an unusual length of time, or some other cause of delay had arisen, for it was one whole minute after the time appointed by Lady Helmsford to set out for Lord Chedworth's select party when he reached her door.

"My lady is gone, sir," said the footman who opened it; "just gone."

Harold's face clouded over. This was scant courtesy, and looked not unlike a design to throw him over, or, as modern speech would have it, "to leave him out in the cold."

However, Harold was determined not to submit to be thus balked of an entertainment which had been the groundwork of much boasting. The Langleys, right or left of the line, were never deficient in pluck. 'Tis true he had been included in Lady Helmsford's invitation—as if he were to be of her following—nevertheless he would not hesitate to present himself alone. So, returning to his coach, he directed the driver to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and in gathering wrath against the Countess and his *fiancée*, he jolted and bumped away to that aristocratic locality.

Meantime Mistress Letitia Sparrow, being a sociable soul and given to hospitality, had taken advantage of the unusual circumstance that the Countess and her niece had gone out together, to invite Mistress Dorothy and Master Chifferil to tea in an apartment which she considered her sitting-room, but which, in the Countess's mind, was allotted to the occupation of two exceedingly ugly and evil-disposed pug-dogs, who were especially under the care of Mistress Letitia. They had their meals there when the Countess was out or indisposed for their society; for in truth that great lady was not by nature inclined to pets; but never behind the fashion, she duly added china monsters and hideous pugs to her animate and inanimate furniture when the mode demanded it. There also were *their respective* baskets, mats, blankets, and all possible

provision for their comfort ; for if their superb mistress was somewhat indifferent ; they had awakened the liveliest interest in the sensitive heart of Mistress Letitia ; and it must be admitted that towards her they showed whatever of love and gratitude existed in their cynical nature—for rare is the doggish heart in which more or less of both are not to be found—oftener more than less.

On this occasion, then, this apartment was swept and garnished. The warm stuff curtains were let down from the heavy festoons in which it was then the fashion to loop them ; the fire blazed merrily : the carved oaken presses—which nowadays would fetch a high price in Wardour Street, but which had been thrust away there as too cumbersome and unsightly for the grander rooms—reflected back the light from surfaces as bright as beeswax and elbow-grease could make them.

The center table was laid with a set of dainty cups and saucers, and an exquisitely-painted teapot with a silver spout, which had been discarded by my lady for one of real Chinese china in the shape of a toad ; cakes of all descriptions and sweetmeats in little cut-glass dishes furnished forth a tempting array ; and Mistress Sparrow tripped to and fro, adding final touches to the feast, attired in her favorite mixture of pea-green and pink, rouged, patched, and powdered to the exact point of fashion.

Mistress Dorothy—in a sober costume of black silk, somewhat brown and darned, but well preserved, and lightened by a fichu of good white lace folded neatly over the bosom, black-lace mittens on her hands, a lace cap over her rebellious gray hair, and a white-lace apron—stood by the fire.

“ I think we may as well sit down,” said Mistress Sparrow. “ I did ask Master Chifferil to join our tea-table, but he is late. Master Chifferil is really a man of parts and much information ; indeed, he ever shows me respect and observance, as if he was aware that I was somewhat above the common. How different from the presumption and forwardness of my lady’s woman—Mistress Beville—who is really quite an ignorant low sort of crea-

ture, only my lady's notice has well-nigh turned her head; 'tis indeed marvelous how the Countess spoils her. Heigho! I cannot boast *her* arts—even Master Chifferil is quite aware of the difference between us. I only fear I do not reciprocate his consideration as I ought," concluded Mistress Sparrow, smiling with her head on one side as she placed a dish of strawberry preserve corner-ways with mathematical precision.

"To be sure he's a nice little crature," returned Dorothy, who had kept a tinge of her native accent, notwithstanding her long expatriation; "I wonder would nothing fatten him—" Her conjectures were stopped by a modest tap at the door, and Chifferil himself entered.

"Ladies, your most obedient," he bowed low. "I greatly fear I am a few minutes behind time—for which, my amiable Mistress Sparrow, I do entreat your pardon; but the truth is, I was detained by a consultation with Master Hobson, the butler; he wished my advice respecting a young man who offered himself for the place of poor Truscott."

"What has come to him?" asked Mistress Dorothy as they placed themselves at table.

"Only last night, leaving the Duchess of Beaulieu's rout, some fellows picked a quarrel with the poor young man and broke his head. He was obliged to lie up, and is gone to lodge with a friend. However he is most desirous of not losing her ladyship's service, and has sent an acquaintance here to-day to entreat Hobson to take him as *locum tenens* till Truscott is able to resume his duties."

"Dear, dear! what a business it was, to be sure! My lady was in a rare temper about it; I believe she offered a reward for the discovery of whoever injured her servant."

"She wished to do so, madam, but on my persuasion desisted. You see, mesdames, the culprits would have sworn that Truscott began the fight and only had the punishment he deserved. My lady manages to have much her own way, but not everything."

"Pray, sir, is your tea sweet enough?"

"I do not think Mistress Sparrow has looked into it," replied the gallant Chifferil.

"La, sir ! that is indeed a civil way of saying 'tis not. And," continued Mistress Sparrow, as she gracefully extended a somewhat skinny arm to drop another lump of sugar into Chifferil's cup, "what has Master Hobson decided ?"

"Contrary to my advice he hath engaged this young spark. I do not quite like his looks—but what with compassion for Truscott and some consideration concerning wages, Hobson has been overcome ; so the new lackey is to enter on service to-morrow."

"Mistress Dorothy, you eat nothing, ma'am. Pray let me recommend these muffins ; our cook hath a rare gift for most cakes, specially these buttered sort. How sweet your young lady did look, to be sure, as she went out just now. I think her simple gown of Indian muslin and white silk, and all that delicate point d'Alençon on the bodice, with naught save a white rose in her hair, became her rarely—only she is a thought colorless."

"And no wonder," exclaimed Dorothy, setting down her cup with vehemence. "Look at the life she leads ! Mewed up all day in hot rooms ; 'tis like a fight for life to get leave to breathe the air. Then we never know from day to day what is to become of us. My lady is very good and generous, but if she took the turn she might bundle us back to that dark devil Langley any day. I'm told he might take me darlin' whenever he likes ; and, mark my words, the uncertainty is killing her."

"Then she does not like her *fiancé*, Captain Langley ?" simpered Mistress Sparrow, as she refilled Dorothy's cup.

"Do you know it is whispered she is already married to him, only a former wife or some such thing turned up, so they are temporarily separated."

"That's all lies," cried Dorothy uncompromisingly.

"Come now, dear Mistress Dorothy," said Letitia in her most imploring and persuasive accents, "do tell us the facts about this marriage—for there was a something, eh ?"

"There's a 'something' every day," returned Dorothy stoutly, "but I have nothing to tell about a marriage."

The rubbish that gossips invent isn't worth a sensible woman's while to listen to."

"Well, Mistress Dorothy, I hope I am not a gossip!" exclaimed Mistress Sparrow, with an offended air.

"Is it you!" cried Mistress Dorothy, with a short laugh. "Troth! not at all—only maybe you listen to gossips sometimes."

"I am sure," quoth Chifferil, hastening to pour oil on the troubled waters, "I am sure Mistress Sparrow's native goodness and refinement forbid her to share the vulgar taste for gossip."

"I declare, sir, you are vastly too polite. But tell me, good Mistress Dorothy, was your young lady not surrounded by admirers in France."

"I'd like to see the one that would come near her while she was in Madame Wandesforde's care—or mine neither. I don't like the way you have in this country of letting young men—ay, and old ones too—talk nonsense to girls that are scarce out of their nursery, till they don't know if they are on their heads or their heels. There was no one near us there in the old château of rank enough to come near my lord's daughter. No more tea, I thank you, but just the least taste in life of the muffins, they are mighty fine."

At this stage of the proceedings the door cautiously opened, and a black head with gleaming eyes and teeth intruded itself.

"Is Massa Chifferil in here?" said Gomez, and at his voice the two pugs, Mab and Tab, who had hitherto slumbered peacefully, flew from the hearthrug with frantic barkings—having a deep and irreconcilable hatred to the negro. He bent his woolly head and twisted his features into a hideous grimace which made the little animals still more furious, although they barked at a safe distance, turning their little snubby heads and indignant eyes every minute or two to Mistress Letitia, as if to say, "Why don't you put him out?"

"Hush, Mab! be quiet, Tab—there's no hearing oneself speak," cried Mistress Sparrow. "Yes, Gomez. *Master Chifferil is here*; what do you want?"

"Massa Chifferil, gemplum wants to see you. Walk in, sar." Whereupon, with a droll triumphant look, he threw the door open, and to poor Chifferil's horror, ushered in D'Arcy, who, stopping just within the entrance, executed three grave deep bows.

It was indeed D'Arcy, but considerably changed and improved ; his clothes were good, glossy, and well-fitting, of a deep bottle-green, slightly ornamented by black silk lace ; his head covered with a solemn stiffly-curled wig, such as were affected by grave men of business ; his long sinewy lower limbs covered by black woolen stockings, and plain silver buckles in his high-quartered shoes.

"I greatly fear my presence is an intrusion," said D'Arcy in his curious, solemn, singing kind of speech. "I wanted a few words of business with Master Chifferil, but I did not reckon on finding him in grand company."

"Sir," replied Mistress Letitia, curtsying with much elegance and urbanity, "Master Chifferil's friend is very welcome."

"Oh ! a—a—Mr. a—" hesitated the wretched Chifferil, whose very wig vibrated with horror at this apparition.

"D'Arcy," put in that imperturbable personage. "I promised to let you know when there was a good chance of snapping up some South Sea stock—so—"

"Oh yes, exactly ! but I shall have a few words with you on business matters presently—we must not trouble the ladies with such uninteresting topics."

"His stockbroker, my dear !" whispered Letitia to Dorothy. "Knows what he is about, does little Mr. Chifferil."

"As you like, sir, as you like," returned D'Arcy.

"Would the gentleman take a cup of tea now ?" asked Mistress Sparrow sweetly.

"I thank you, madam. 'Tis a beverage I'm not partial to. I have ever preferred Tokay to Bohay. I will just await my respected friend's pleasure to discuss the matters I have called about."

"Certainly ! I will come with you now," exclaimed Chifferil, rising nervously.

"What! and leave the tay and the ladies! I am ashamed of you, Master Chifferil. *I'm* in no hurry—it's not every day I get into such charming company;" this was said with the utmost gravity, but a curious twinkle in his dark and rather sunken eyes might have suggested to a shrewd observer that he enjoyed the little secretary's confusion.

"Pray sit down, sir," was Mistress Letitia's practical reply to the polite speech. "I have no doubt we can find refreshment more suited to your taste. Be quiet, Tab! I shall have to whip you, Mab!" for the pugs kept sniffing unpleasantly round D'Arcy's legs, breaking out into relapses of barking every now and then.

"These are mighty pretty little bastes, ma'am," said he, drawing a chair to the table and depositing his hat on the carpet beside him, "and as fat as porposes. Ah! ye'd get a long price for them in many a place I've been in."

Perhaps by some mystic intuition Tab divined the source of this admiration, for he suddenly lifted up his nose and howled discordantly.

"Dear, dear! I never did know those dogs half so troublesome," cried Mistress Letitia, pouring out some cream for each of them.

"They would so, sir!" said Dorothy, who had not spoken since the stranger had entered, but had gazed at him intently with a startled look; "the poor cratures at Limerick would have made a grand meal on them the time of the siege."

D'Arcy looked at her with earnestness equal to her own, a quick glance of recognition coming into his eyes; but he gave a short warning shake of the head and a nod in the direction of Mistress Letitia, whose back was towards them, as she opened a cupboard to set forth a flask of strong waters, which she thought might suit Master D'Arcy's taste more than tea.

"Exactly, ma'am—or at Londonderry, where they were put to sore straits. Sure, Master Chifferil, you are in *luck*, sir, to have so kind and obliging a lady to receive *your friends*. Is she your daughter now?"

"Oh! dear me, Master D'Arcy, that is a bad compliment to pay our friend," simpered Mistress Letitia, greatly flattered, "though I am sure we all look on Master Chifferil as a stay to the house—especially when my lady is away. Try a piece of cake, Master D'Arcy; it's bad drinking without food."

D'Arcy gravely accepted.

"Well, sir, I hope the stock continues to rise," said Chifferil uneasily, to change the conversation.

"It does—it does," returned D'Arcy, as soon as he had disposed of a large mouthful of cake. "I have some memoranda to show you which will induce you to go deeper into the undertaking, or I am much mistaken. What do you say, ladies? Are you inclined to try for a fortune?"

"I am sure, sir, the few pounds I have managed to save would not go far to lay the foundation," said Mistress Sparrow.

"And I have nothing I can call my own," said Dorothy, with a sigh.

"Pooh!" returned the gallant D'Arcy, refilling his glass. "It is the duty of gentlemen to work for the ladies, and so you ought not to trouble yourselves."

"I am sure, sir, that is the sentiment of a gentleman and a soldier," said Mistress Sparrow, smiling graciously upon him; "and a soldier I am sure you have been—any one could see that."

"Soldiering is a quare training for Change Alley," remarked Dorothy, a little querulously.

"I'm not so sure of that," returned D'Arcy. "There's fighting in both, and it's hard to say which sort is the bitterest."

"Suppose," said Chifferil, who looked most unhappy, "we retire to my cabinet, where I can look at your papers and—"

"All in good time," replied the imperturbable intruder. "Here we are, a nice little quartette—why should we not have a game of whist?"

"Why not?" cried Dorothy, who had had a long fast from cards—a means of amusement highly disapproved

by Madame Wandesforde, but which Dorothy had nevertheless often surreptitiously enjoyed with the intendant of the château, as the excellent woman was by no means spiritually-minded.

Her "why not?" was cordially echoed by Mistress Sparrow, who desired the young woman in waiting to clear away the tea, leaving the flask and cake; and the wretched Chifferil was forced to take his part in the rubber, which was gravely continued with varying fortunes. In the course of it D'Arcy uttered an occasional exclamation in French, as if excited by the chances of the game. The first time he did so Dorothy looked up quickly, but after rather bent down her head each time he spoke in that language.

At last D'Arcy rose. "Now you must not be keeping me any longer," he exclaimed, to Chifferil's great surprise. "It is hard to leave pleasant company, but I must not be too late in getting back to the city. I will show you the share list if you like."

"Come with me then," said Chifferil, with great alacrity.

Mistress Sparrow arranged herself in an attitude favorable to the execution of an elegant curtsy, when Mistress Dorothy stepped forward, and said, with some little hesitation:

"I am sure I am among friends, so I need not have been so cautious. There is a thrifle I have scraped together and kept very careful. Now if this good gentleman could double it for me, as he and Master Chifferil were speaking about, why I would be as pleased as Punch."

"Very good, ma'am."

"Then if you will come with me to my mistress's sitting-room, I will give you—the—the—"

"The cash," put in D'Arcy, seeing her hesitate, "and I will write you a receipt. I see, Master Chifferil, 'tis a recommendation to be your man of business."

"Dear, dear! perhaps I had better venture too," cried Mistress Letitia.

"Maybe I won't have any shares to dispose of; but *I'll let you know, madam—I'll let you know,*" replied D'Arcy.

"Come with me then, sir," said Dorothy; "I will not keep you long."

When Dorothy reached the apartment occupied by Maud, she hastily lit the candles which stood upon the mantelpiece from the one she herself carried, and then turned to look keenly at D'Arcy.

"You know me, Dorothy Kean," he said.

"Ay, that I do—that I do," she returned in a carefully suppressed voice, and stretching out both hands.

He took and held them for a minute, during which both kept silence and looked sadly at each other; then Dorothy withdrew hers, and sitting down on a low ottoman, leant her elbows on her knees and covered her face with her hands, rocking herself to and fro.

"Ah!" she exclaimed at length, "I never thought to have looked upon your face again, and now it brings back to me the dear dead, and my youth, and those sad bitter times of mortal fear! Yet how pleased I am to see ye, D'Arcy!"

"And I to see you, mavourneen," he returned, with wonderful kindness.

"I thought you were dead—long ago!" resumed Dorothy. "Where have you been, and what brings you here, at all—at all?"

"As to where I've been," returned D'Arcy, leaning against the mantelpiece, and speaking in his usual manner, "it would take me a week to tell. I have some private business with that poor creature, Chifferil, and little thought to find you here. Times are not hard with you, Dorothy—what are you doing here?"

"I am own woman to the young Lady Langdale," replied Dorothy, with much importance.

D'Arcy uttered an exclamation in some foreign tongue.

"Ah, D'Arcy! do you remember when I last met you, near Paris, ten years ago? I had a darlin' little girl by the hand, and you were footsore and starving; you had been wounded and robbed."

"I do well remember."

"Then that little girl is she who ought to be Baroness Langdale; and the good gentleman who took you in,

and fed you, and gave you money to go on your way to find some one you knew at Brest, was her father—Lord Langdale. I don't think I told you his name then, we had so much to talk about."

"Do you tell me this in truth? Begad! I am more the young lady's servant than ever!"

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?" with sudden inspiration. "Was it you sent her the note last week? tell me truth and no lie. Do you know who passed himself off as the bridegroom? Ah! spake the truth, D'Arcy."

"Note!—no, I never heard of any note; and, Dorothy, last week I thought I knew who the fellow was that stood in young Langley's shoes, but I was mistaken. 'Tis all a mystery; but no note did I ever hear of—now that is God's truth."

"This is the strangest turn! Tell me, asthore, what do ye know about the marriage?"

"Next to nothing; but keep a good heart, my woman. Your lady has a strong watchful friend keeping guard over her—and that is all I dare say."

"That same is not much," cried Dorothy. "Ah! ye must go, my old comrade—ye must go! I dare not seem to know you here; but where—where can I find you if my lady or myself want help?"

"You will always hear of me if you send to Lamb's Coffee House, Lamb's Court, off Holborn, and ask for 'The Blazer.'"

"Ah! how will I find it in this great bewildering town?"

"Ask Chifferil. He's a fellow you can trust, I believe."

"God only knows who is to be trusted, D'Arcy! And are you really a respectable man in that place they are all talking about—Change Alley?"

"I always was respectable," returned D'Arcy solemnly; "but as to Change Alley, I have as much call there as you have need for shares, Mistress Dorothy."

"Well, you mustn't stay longer," she said, "or that *queer little soul*, Mistress Sparrow, will be opening her

eyes. Ah! come back and let me see you, D'Arcy, again."

"I will," he returned, "but not for a bit; and, Dorothy, my woman, be careful, don't let on to know me, unless you want help very bad; and then, better learn the way to Lamb's Court, and come yourself."

"But, D'Arcy, I never could leave my dear child, if there was danger about."

"Then bring her, too!" he exclaimed impressively; "she would be safer with old Robilliard than in many a nobleman's house."

"Who's Robilliard?"

"The landlord of Lamb's. Ask for him when you go, and he will know where I am."

"Lamb's Court, Holborn," repeated Dorothy. "Then good-night, D'Arcy, and God bless you."

"God bless you," he returned, and shook her hand.

"You will most likely meet Master Chifferil in the room below, where we had tea. Stay, I will light you down."

This she did in silence, uttering another brief "Good-night, and God be with you," as they reached the door.

D'Arcy found Mistress Sparrow busily arranging the respective couches of Mab and Tab, who, tolerably accustomed by this time to the objectionable stranger, mildly testified their disapprobation by a series of bitter whining growls.

"Now, sir," said D'Arcy to Chifferil, who, in a state of the utmost nervous irritation, was pacing the room, "I have settled my business with that good lady, and I'm at *your* service."

"Madam, I have the honor to wish you good-night, with many thanks for your elegant hospitality."

"Good-evening, my dear Mistress Sparrow," exclaimed Chifferil with great alacrity.

"Good-night, gentlemen," simpered Letitia, "and perhaps Master D'Arcy will give me another opportunity of purchasing a few shares—or one."

"Certainly, madam—at present what I have are be-spoke," returned D'Arcy dryly.

"Follow me, then," said Chifferil, and led the way to his own little den, which was on the ground-floor at the back of the mansion. Closing the door carefully, and setting the candle on the mantelpiece, Chifferil threw himself into a chair and heaved a deep sigh.

"My good sir," he said, "my very good sir, may I ask what induced you to run so fearful a risk as to come here openly? I have had my heart in my mouth ever since I saw you."

"Because I came with a message from my noble commander!"

"But suppose my lady—"

"I knew she was out," said D'Arcy; "besides, I never knew where that thief of the world, Gomez, was leading me till I walked right on top of your elegant tay-table. Now here's me business—Don Juan desired me to tell you that he has been obliged to send the 'lame beggar' abroad; moreover, he has been watched, so you must be particularly careful. The Don doesn't think there will be much to fear for some days, so long as my lady the Countess keeps Mistress Langley with her."

"Surely she has no thought of giving her up to John Langley and his son!"

"That you best know. I have delivered Don Monteiro's message; and, look you, Master Chifferil, don't put yourself all of a shake if I come in to ask for instructions touching your shares: a bold front carries you over many an obstacle. Now, have you any word for my captain?"

"Only a few lines," returned Chifferil, seating himself at the table and writing hastily. As soon as he had finished and folded the note D'Arcy took it, and wishing Chifferil a brief good-night, departed.

The secretary looked after him, while he slowly rubbed his hands together and murmured to himself: "How will it all end? Langley has legal power and great interest. My lady is doubtful—no one knows save myself, how doubtful—and I am not sure if the Spanish gentleman's help will be of much avail. 'Tis a rare tangle, *would I could have kept out of it*; but I could not. I

have not properly digested a meal since I had his first letter saying he was in town and wherefore." So muttering, Chifferil sat down to toast his shins with a discomfited expression of countenance.

Meantime, to revert to Lord Chedworth's drum.

When Maud had dressed and obeyed her aunt's summons to descend, as it was time to set out, she was greatly surprised to find her standing by the fire in the dining-room—the table being partly covered with fruits and richly-cut glass decanters, evidently the last stage of a late dinner—and on the back of a high chair leant Don Juan di Monteiro, in his usual costume of black velvet, costly lace, and diamond buckles. Both were laughing and talking in apparently high spirits.

The sound jarred on Maud, who was somewhat depressed. The days which had intervened since her expedition to the Park had been peculiarly lonely. Although her aunt had several times sent for her to assist in receiving visitors, they had been most uncongenial, and she had been treated in the most marked manner as Harold Langley's *fiancée*; he himself being generally present and playing the part of lover with insolent pretension. She had, on both the last occasions when sent for, pleaded headache, and was greatly relieved to find the excuse admitted. The weather, too, had been wet, and she had no excuse for even asking to go out, so that her spirits were not in tune for the scene which awaited her.

Lady Helmsford's grand beauty was set forth by a magnificent dress of rose-color brocaded with silver, diamonds in her ears, at her throat, and sparkling amongst her thick black tresses mixed with damask roses and green leaves. She looked unusually well, an air of triumph sat on her brow, and as Maud—oppressed by a sense of her difficulties in having to combine obedience to her aunt's wishes as regarded Monteiro with a due amount of politeness—approached somewhat timidly, she felt in some indescribable manner crushed by her aunt's splendor.

"Come here, child," said the Countess. "Don Juan has prayed me to take him with us to Lord Chedworth's

—though he refused the invitation originally. We do not look for these variations in the nobler sex. I fear me, sir, you are not constant !”

“Most constant, madam, when once I really attach myself,” returned Monteiro, with a deep bow to Maud as she stood, so slender and delicately fair, in the shadow of her aunt’s magnificence, like a pale Provence rose.

“Suppose, Maud, we start at once, as your cavalier has not yet arrived, and take mine,” a gay glance at Monteiro, “instead. Our number would be still the same, and I doubt if my Lord Chedworth will know who is who, provided you are there.”

“I should indeed be glad if you will do so, dear aunt,” said Maud simply and earnestly, but the words had scarce passed her lips when she would have fain recalled them. Monteiro, it is true, bowed his thanks in silence ; but never before had she met such a glance as that which gleamed for an instant in his quick dark eyes—it was a sudden revelation that infinitely alarmed her.

“On my word, Captain Langley had need be flattered, and you too, sir,” said the Countess, with something of sarcasm in her tone. “Let us go then,” she added, giving her hand to Monteiro, who led her, with the solemn courtesy of the period, to her carriage.

The way seemed both long and rugged, as the condition of London streets at that day was something painful to journey over ; nor were they any more safe than passable. However, my Lady Helmsford had a proper following of stout servants armed with staffs, and sat serenely superior to the terrors that pressed upon wretches of inferior quality.

As soon as the rumor of Lady Helmsford’s arrival reached his ears, Lord Chedworth hastened to receive his fair guests with almost regal honors, for he met them at the foot of the staircase, and led the Countess with *débonnaire* courtesy to the reception-room—Maud being obliged to follow with Monteiro, who addressed one or two observations to her in French, which were so coldly received that he took refuge in silence, gazing at her *from time to time* with a grave puzzled expression.

On reaching the first of a suite of rooms the host turned with a questioning look and said, "I thought young Captain Langley was to have accompanied your ladyship?"

"He was not in time, so we brought Don Juan di Monteiro in his place," returned the Countess, smiling.

"I am gratified the gallant Don has rescinded his resolution not to honor me with his company," said the courteous host; "still I cannot but sympathize with the poor young captain's disappointment—though how he came not to be before instead of after time on such an occasion passes me. Ah! fairest Mistress Langley, were it my lot to boast the proud distinction your cousin claims, you would see—"

"Claims, my lord, do not imply necessarily the right of the claimant," interrupted Monteiro, with animation; "and one great charm of English society to me, is the freedom of choice permitted to the young demoiselles."

"A freedom which is barely nominal," said the Countess.

"But which is only just and right," remarked Maud in a low tone.

Her aunt looked surprised and displeased.

"Indeed," whispered Lord Chedworth, "is it possible that hearts exist hard enough to force your choice! would it were mine to set you free!"

Maud could not resist the sense of absurdity which the old nobleman's languishing air and impassioned look called up; she laughed sweetly, frankly—so that none could take offense—and said, still smiling, "I imagine all Lady Helmsford's friends must know what measure of freedom is accorded to me."

"Come then, mesdames," cried Lord Chedworth, "let me have the honor of directing your notice to what poor specimens of china I have been able to collect."

At that instant a footman announced "Captain Harold Langley."

"Give me your arm, Don Juan, we will pass on," said Lady Helmsford.

Lord Chedworth, of course, turned to receive his

guest, and Maud, deserted by her aunt, remained beside him.

"I had feared you had forgotten your engagement," observed the host, after the usual punctilious salutations had passed.

"And I feared I had been forgotten by my party, my lord," said the young man, fighting hard with a scowl. "I was scarce a minute late, yet Lady Helmsford had already set out. You must not set me down as a recreant, fair cousin! I would not, you well know, willingly miss one moment of your sweet company."

"No, cousin Harold," said she, drawing instinctively closer to her host, "I think that in real truth we love not each other's company! Is it not better always to be true, my lord?"

"Yes, dear lady—wise as you are fair; but, indeed you must not deal too hardly with your kinsman—see, he is overwhelmed. Come, sir, we were about to make a slight inspection of a few objects of curiosity—pray accompany us." So saying he offered his hand to Maud, who gladly took it, and they proceeded through the suite of handsomely furnished rooms to one at the end, where a rare display of china, carved ivory, and Venetian glass was set forth.

When Don Juan di Monteiro found himself carried away by the imperious Countess he felt furious with her, himself, Langley, and above all the irresistible laws of conventionality, which compelled him to obey her proposition.

"Let them fight it out between them, my dear Juan," said Lady Helmsford, laughing lightly, "while we examine our noble host's collection."

"Yes! but is it quite right to desert that poor young lady, and leave her to Langley's platitudes, which evidently bore her to death?"

"That 'poor young lady' seems to have no lack of champions," returned the Countess tartly; "Lord Chedworth will divide the task of boring her, and perhaps two *bores* may neutralize each other."

"*Truly, madam*, I wonder that a lady so clever and

powerful as yourself can permit your fair niece to be thus persecuted."

"Monteiro ! you do not understand our laws. If I were openly to oppose him, John Langley would reclaim his ward, and I could not hinder him. But I have laid my plans. The suit in the Ecclesiastical Court to set aside this marriage shall be gone into as soon as—well, as soon as possible—and then I think Maud had much better wed our good host."

"And this is freedom of choice," cried Monteiro.

"My dear friend, there is no such thing ! I had none. A girl is better without it. What can she know of her own mind ? of life—of—Ah ! believe me, 'tis the love of the ripe woman who has seen and known, and with matured taste and judgment makes her choice, that is the best, the most flattering—and most calculated to bestow bliss !"

This speech was accompanied by a glowing smile, downcast eyes, and a slight pressure of the hand in which her own lay, but nevertheless it only elicited a very abrupt "Perhaps so" from Monteiro, who with difficulty repressed far different words, and who no doubt, had Moore written a century earlier, would have quoted, "Give me back the wild freshness of morning."

"And why do you not go on with this suit ? You would be better free from so troublesome a charge."

"Because—well—of course there is some difficulty with John Langley ; but then that silly girl refuses to be a party to it. However, she must yield."

"This is very strange," said the Spaniard. "But look, Lady Helmsford, here is a most dainty monster." Monteiro pointed, as he spoke, to a large squat sort of toad-dragon, with a twisted tail of green and gold, fiery-red jaws, and a backbone of purple-blue.

"It is indeed rare," cried the Countess with great animation. "Has your Grace," she added, addressing a stately lady who politely made way for her to approach this work of art, "has your Grace seen this charming collection before ?"

"No !" returned the Duchess of B——, who, with

her daughter, was among the guests ; "and I must say I am somewhat envious of my Lord Chedworth. I flattered myself I had a dragon teapot unsurpassed, but *this* puts mine quite in the shade."

A short but lively colloquy ensued respecting the merits of Indian *versus* real china—as the ceramic productions of the celestial empire were called, at the end of which her Grace moved to the irresistible card-room, and Lady Helmsford, looking round, missed Monteiro. An expression of extreme surprise came over her face, but she was immediately addressed by some of the numerous fine gentlemen ever ready to win a word, or a smile, from the handsome modish Countess, and some time elapsed before she met the truant.

Meanwhile Lord Chedworth had conducted Maud and her cousin to a smaller inner chamber, exclusively given to some more exquisite and select specimens than those in the larger apartment. Maud, whose eye and taste had been formed on good models during her long sojourn in France, was greatly charmed with some Indian and Venetian articles, and listened with real interest to all Lord Chedworth had to say on the subject, while Harold endured the talk with as polite an exterior as he could manage to present—being an ingrained barbarian, scantily lacquered with a coat of varnish.

"I know not why it is," said Maud to her elderly admirer, "but I cannot admire these great ugly monsters which are so much valued now."

"Your taste, being superior, is naturally opposed to the giddy throng."

"I am not so sure, my lord, that the greater number is not more likely to be right than the individual. However, I can but express my real taste."

"I can never imagine Mademoiselle anything save faithful and true," said Monteiro in French, as he at that moment joined them.

Maud looked grave and kept silence, determined to have as little as possible to say to him.

"Exactly so, sir," returned Lord Chedworth, who was *an unusually accomplished man*, and had a hazy sort of

knowledge of French, partly guessing that a compliment had been uttered. "I was just indicating to Mistress Langley those objects most worth her notice. You have been a great traveler, sir, my Lady Helmsford tells me; can you say if this is a piece of genuine Japan work?"

"I know nothing of Eastern lands," said Monteiro, coming forward and taking a sort of circular gold plaque enriched with dull green stones from Lord Chedworth, "and, alas! I am very ignorant of art—but," looking at it earnestly, "this is not from Japan, or any Eastern country. This is Mexican work."

"Indeed! I had no idea such things existed there!"

"Oh! there was a strange rare kind of civilization there once; and bits of marvelously delicate workmanship fall into our hands sometimes."

"Our hands!" said Harold rudely. "That is somewhat ambiguous. May I ask whose?"

"Mine!" said Monteiro, turning and looking at him so straight and so fiercely, that Harold was quieted for a while, "mine—and those of the men who served under my command."

"Exactly so—exactly so," said Lord Chedworth, with an elaborately polite bow intended evidently to express his disapprobation of Harold's tone. "Then this is in truth a rarity?"

"Of much value—at least as a curiosity."

"The fellow is a buccaneer—trust me—a pirate that ought to be hung," whispered Harold to Maud.

"Nay, that is impossible!" she returned, with an incredulous smile, looking at the noble air and graceful figure of the Spaniard as he stood talking with their host.

"Fine feathers make fine birds," remarked Harold. "Come, sweet cousin—let me lead you to the refreshment-room, and leave my lord and his freebooting friend to babble about crockery."

"I thank you, sir! It would be scarce polite to leave our host who conducted me here. When he is at liberty I will ask him to find my aunt."

Harold stood aside in deep mortification, knowing few persons present, and feeling himself *de trop*. But Lord

Chedworth, breaking from his conversation, turned to Maud.

"You have had enough of these dry topics, fair Mistress Langley ; let me get you some refreshment."

"I thank you ; but first permit me to examine this curious jeweled glass with all the wavy lines."

"Ah, yes ! 'tis Venetian, and one of the fabled goblets that break if filled with poisoned wine."

As Lord Chedworth, Maud, and Monteiro closed round the bracket which held the glass, a richly-dressed foppish young man strolled into the room. "Ha ! you here, Langley ?"

"I thought I told you I was engaged to Lord Chedworth to-night."

"Gad ! one has so much to think of, I forgot. Who is the slender beauty in white ?"

"My cousin and betrothed—Mistress Maud Langley."

"Lucky dog !" returned the other, who was Sir Eustace Blount, gazing at her with lazy admiration. "She is a dainty blossom—shows blood too. Give ye joy, Langley ! No use in asking you to try your luck at piquet ?"

"Why, yes ! to attend one's *fiancée* is about as animating an occupation as making love to one's wife. Have with you for what game you like," cried Harold, infinitely relieved to find a congenial companion, and one, too, of undoubted rank and fashion. The two young men therefore retired to the card-room, and when Maud looked up from her examination of the Venetian goblet, to her great joy one source of annoyance had disappeared. At this moment an important personage, not in livery, and evidently the butler, approached, and in a solemn suppressed tone addressed the master of the house :

"Lord Sunderland just arrived, my lord."

"Indeed !" cried Lord Chedworth. "My dear young lady, you must excuse me for a moment. I want to say a word to Sunderland ; meantime, Don Monteiro, will you see that Mistress Langley has some refreshment ? 'Tis spread in the second room on the right—I will rejoin you *there* ;" and his lordship walked quickly away.

The color flushed in Maud's cheek at this involuntary

infringement of her aunt's injunction, for she felt, rather than knew, how serious would be her displeasure. Moreover she was curiously uneasy in Monteiro's company. Why, she could not tell, indeed she scarce acknowledged it to herself. She was always dimly conscious that, unseen by others, he watched her every movement, and listened to every word she uttered—and yet he seemed to be her aunt's suitor ! She would almost have preferred to have been left to Harold's care.

Meantime Monteiro was bowing low before her and offering his hand to lead her to the refreshment-room. The hand Maud laid in his was tremulous, and the bright color still glowed in her cheek.

"I was fearful when I saw you first this evening," said Monteiro in a low voice and hesitating manner, very different from his ordinary frank free tone, "that you had been suffering from indisposition since I had the happiness of meeting you in the Park. There was that in your expression—" he paused.

"I thank you, sir. I have been well," replied Maud very coldly.

Monteiro looked up quickly at the sound of her voice, quickly and inquiringly, and then went on speaking, in French, of France, as if endeavoring to lead her back to the friendly and confidential tone that had suddenly and naturally sprung up between them when he last had the chance of speaking with her alone, but in vain ; her answers were severely polite, and as short as was consistent with good breeding. Indeed, while Maud was sipping her tea she was reflecting how she could dispense with her cavalier and contrive to reach her aunt. After a short silence in which Monteiro had taken refuge after the last rebuff, he exclaimed, with more of his ordinary manner :

"Madam, be your own frank self, and tell me how have I been so unfortunate as to offend you ?"

"You have in no way offended me, Monsieur, nor am I aware that I show any offense."

"*Caramba !*" exclaimed Monteiro, "I am indeed unhappy—you close the door of explanation, while I have scarce a right even to ask wherefore."

"I see nothing to explain—and here is Lord Chedworth."

Maud rose joyfully, and made a step forward to meet her host, who was seeking her.

Monteiro, looking very dark and moody, kept aloof, while Lord Chedworth, radiant at the gracious reception accorded him, led his fair guest to the principal drawing-room, where, he whispered, inexorable circumstance compelled him to leave her for a while in her aunt's care.

The apartment which Maud now entered was spacious, paneled in white and gold, and richly furnished, though in a heavier and more antique fashion than Lady Helmsford's grand new mansion. About thirty persons or so were grouped about very effectively, under the brilliant wax-lights profusely supplied by chandeliers, girandoles, and candelabra. Here were a couple engaged at chess, there a wit in an attitude, with the uplifted pinch of snuff held gracefully, while his red heels were drawn together in the act of bowing, uttered some racy *double entendre*, at which the fine jeweled, powdered, rouged, elegant dames laughed, or spread huge fans to hide the absence of blushes which would not come; on one side were maccaronis in the last supreme fashion, uttering *very* soft nonsense to simpering listening belles; at the other, a graver and more solid order of gentry, discussing politics and the prospects of South Sea stock. Feathers waved, and fans fluttered; the whole scene a flood of variegated color; brocades and velvets of every hue; gold and silver embroidery, diamonds, jewels glitter—the men as gorgeous as the women. It was a wonderful magnificence that frothed up to the top of the misery, and poverty, and misrule underlying the fair surface of the great world at the commencement of the Georgian era.

At the side opposite to them, as Maud and the host entered, her rich dress spread out on a settee, sat Lady Helmsford talking and smiling graciously to a tall distinguished-looking man in a plum-colored brocade suit richly laced with gold, wearing wrought gold knee and *shoe buckles*, and a profusely-curled wig. Lady Helms-

ford slowly opened and shut her fan as she talked with a haughty grace peculiar to her ; but Maud could see that through all she looked beyond Lord Chedworth and herself at some object behind them, and that her eye sparkled angrily as she did so.

"I bring you your fair niece," said Lord Chedworth ; and as Maud placed herself beside Lady Helmsford, he added : "I think, my lord, 'tis a lovely illustration of Juno and Psyche !"

The tall gentleman smiled. "It is indeed," he said ; "and this young lady ?" he added in a quietly questioning manner to the Countess.

"Ought to be Baroness Langdale," she returned. "Allow me to present her to you ! Maud, this is my Lord Sunderland ! I trust your lordship will do something for us, now that you have met the dispossessed one."

"That would I willingly, madam," said Lord Sunderland, bowing with kindly graciousness. "But 'tis a curious and confused matter, this 'Heritage of Langdale.' Yet it meets me constantly ; every one seems interested in it ! Where," he continued in a lower tone, while he looked with interest at Maud, "where is young Captain Langley—does your ladyship know him ?"

"Yes—certainly ! he is here, gambling yonder with Sir Eustace Blount."

"Young men are colder than they were," said the Earl, laughing. "I know scarce any game that would have drawn me from so fair a mistress at his age."

"'Tis as well so ; he is no match for my niece," returned the Countess haughtily. "But you will bear my request in mind, my good lord ?"

"Egad, madam ! I'll be certain to have my memory jogged ! Scarce a day passes but something reminds me of that mistaken, pleasant, genial fellow, Langdale, and his forfeited estate. I will institute a thorough search for the missing document. And now I must bid your ladyship good-evening ; but first, can you tell me who is that dark, foreign-looking gentleman in black velvet, talking to the charming Mrs. Ferrars ?"

"A Don Juan di Monteiro."

"Ha! a Spaniard! What brings him here?"

"I scarce know; he has, I believe, some English connections and friends about the King, for whose coming he waits. I knew him in Paris, where he was well received."

"Indeed—but I must go! I kiss your ladyship's hand. Fair Mistress Langley, I am your servant." And Lord Sunderland bowed himself gracefully away.

The rest of the evening was a painful confusion to Maud.

She was aware of oppressive attentions from Lord Chedworth, and still more wearisome observance from Harold, who ostentatiously presented his friend Sir Eustace Blount. She was aware that Monteiro spoke often, but interruptedly with the Countess; that there was a perpetual babble of talk and laughter which bewildered her; finally she was released.

The Countess's carriage was announced, and Monteiro, refusing to return with them, resigned his place to Harold; but he contrived to hand Maud downstairs, and asked her more than once in French: "Will you not walk again in the Park, when the weather is brighter? Why will you not answer?" But Maud kept silence, and at last found refuge in the darkness of their homeward route. Harold endeavored to keep up a conversation with the Countess; but all were relieved when they reached St. James's Square.

As Maud stopped a moment behind her aunt, who was saying good-night to Harold, her eye suddenly caught a flash like the ray of a jewel in the glare of the torches carried by their attendants: she looked in the direction from whence it came, and partially descried in the gloomy background a tall dim figure wrapped in a cloak, which was neither that of a link-boy nor a servant.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was the evening but one after Lord Chedworth's party. Night had closed in, though it was not late. The usual frequenters of "Lamb's" had gathered within its hospitable portals—much as we have seen them before. Mr. Nathaniel Morley was there in high spirits, and an entirely new suit of clothes—also with replenished pockets, to judge by the large orders he issued to the attendant tapsters, and his lordly swaggering manner. He was laying down the law respecting the prospects of a war with Spain to a select circle of admiring listeners—evidently considering himself the great man of the society there assembled—when the door opened to admit Monteiro, who was (as usual when he visited Lamb's) wrapped in a large loose cloak, which formed an effectual disguise. No one heeded him, and he stood for a moment or two listening to the authoritative harangue of Mr. Morley before summoning one of the waiters, to whom he said shortly :

"Let Robilliard know I am here."

"Ay, sir ; follow me," returned the man, and ushered him through a side door to the same room where he had supped with Chifferil about three weeks before. It was partially lighted by the blaze of a brave fire, and, as before, Monteiro threw aside his cloak impatiently, and drew near the pleasant warmth.

He looked grave and stern, and for the few minutes that elapsed before Robilliard made his appearance he stood as if rooted to the ground, wrapped in thought. Even the host's entrance did not rouse him till the old man spoke :

"Well, Excellency ! 'tis some days since I have seen or heard of you."

"Good-even to you, good friend !" exclaimed Monteiro. "I want some supper, and your company with it. Is D'Arcy here ?"

"No, Señor—nor has he been to-day. I will just order supper and return."

When he did so he found that Monteiro had drawn a chair to the fireside, and was half reclining in it, gazing at the glowing coal, still deep in thought. The old man looked at him, but addressed him no more till the supper, consisting of cold but appetizing viands and one or two foreign-looking bottles, had been placed on the table.

"Your Excellency is served," said Robilliard, drawing the cork of one of the bottles, at the sound of which Monteiro started from his meditations, and filling a tumbler more than half full, drained it quickly:

"Ha! Burgundy!" said he, setting down the glass, "and of the right sort. Come, Robilliard, I have scarce eaten to-day; so supper first, and news after."

Thus saying, he fell to—yet old Robilliard outdid him as a trencher-man, and the interval of eating did not last long.

"You seem moody to-night, sir," said the landlord, when he laid down his knife and fork, and Monteiro still kept silence. "All goes well, I hope?"

"So far, yes, old friend; but it is a more difficult and dangerous task than I anticipated. I did not calculate either on all the dangers it involves."

"You don't often think of danger, Excellency."

"Danger to myself—no! Though I don't want to be killed or disabled either for the next six weeks; but the danger of terror is almost as bad as death to a tender delicate girl. The difficulty of protecting her, while I am myself well-nigh powerless; the desperate anxiety, till the King's return gives me my chance of playing out my trump-card, lest things may not go smoothly—lest any accident may throw her again into Langley's hands—all this preys upon me! Every power, male and female, seems leagued against Lord Langdale's daughter; but I will save her yet, cost what it may of life or gold. I will!"

He rose up as he spoke, and paced the room restlessly.

"Ay! John Langley little reckons on the strength of a strong hatred," said Robilliard complacently.

"Hatred!" repeated Monteiro; then laughing, he returned to the table, and filling a bumper drank it off. "Now, what news, Robilliard?" he said. "I saw and heard that brute Morley as I came through the common room. He has grown prosperous."

"He has," returned the old man, "and of a sudden!—more cautious too in his talk of running away with the heiress he had somehow married. Yet D'Arcy says the plot is not given up."

"Who is this man, and what do you know of him?"

"I have striven to learn all I can. He comes of a decent family, and was once a gentleman, though addicted to all bad courses; was in prison for debt, and escaped; was outlawed; fought at Culloden and elsewhere; and was even mixed up a good deal with the gentlemen smugglers of the south coast. We all know something of the sort of trade that goes on by Langdale and Rye and along there. This was the way he managed to get into the old Priory the time of the marriage—he, or whoever employed him."

"Yes! that may account for much," replied Monteiro thoughtfully. "I wish D'Arcy were here—I have not seen him for two days, and now I have to show myself at an accursed ridotto or some such fandango, so I have not too much time. I say, Robilliard, this is costly work, man—I begin to see the bottom of my treasure-chest. Would to Heaven I had not fooled away so much in Paris, before I dreamed of the task before me!"

"Excellency, what I have is at your service, and I am not penniless. *Mort de ma vie!* I am not penniless."

"Thanks, my good old comrade, I am not quite at the end of my resources yet; but, Robilliard, I have staked my *all* on the game I am playing. If I am beaten I only want to secure a retreat;—promise to give me enough for that, in exchange for my diamond buckles, which help me so wonderfully in this great London world." And Monteiro laughed—a deep rich-toned jovial laugh.

"Retreat!—quit England! when from boyhood you longed so much to be an Englishman!"

"Ay, even so ; if I fail now I scarce care to live."

"Pooh ! life is very sweet at twenty-eight, or thirty, my captain. I suppose if matters go wrong you'll just try back to the Rover's career. Ah, *that's* the life !"

"Never !" cried Monteiro, "never ! I can find work and food, and mayhap more, in some of the various wars now afoot ; but I am not going to fail. *Caramba !* I never dream of failure. However, I may count on you, Robilliard, so far, for funds ?"

"Ay—" Robilliard was beginning, when a cautious yet heavy knock on the door stopped him.

"Who is there ?" said Robilliard, as he partially opened it. "Oh ! come in—come in. We were just speaking of you."

Whereupon D'Arcy, in his ordinary attire, his trusty rapier by his side, stepped into the room.

"What has become of you, D'Arcy ?" cried Monteiro, with displeasure. "I have neither seen nor heard from you since the day before yesterday."

"Well, sir," returned D'Arcy, laying aside his hat and casting a longing look at the supper, "I have been mighty busy, I've been promoted ; I am now master of the horse to my Lord Morley, and yesterday I was sent to buy some nags at Barnet ; not a disagreeable errand, nor unprofitable nayther."

"Explain, explain !" cried Monteiro ; "but first sit down, man, and eat ; you are looking hungry."

D'Arcy quickly obeyed, both Monteiro and Robilliard attending to his needs ; the former at last exclaiming impatiently :

"Gad, D'Arcy ! you can't surely stow anything more away even if you stood up. Here, take another glass of wine, and let us hear your news. Who sent you to Barnet ?"

"Morley ; I tell you he has got money somehow, there's no holding him. The scheme for carrying off Mistress Langley is in full swing, but they are mortally puzzled how to get hold of her. Ye see, my lady the Countess and her following are not to be lightly dealt with."

Monteiro uttered an exclamation or oath under his

breath as he stood grasping the back of a chair, his dark keen eyes fixed on the speaker with almost fierce attention.

"They are, as I said, 'puzzled,'" continued D'Arcy. "So you see the word is, to be *ready* night and day for any service; and I was sent to buy six good strong horses fit for draught or saddle, but I could only get four. I might have secured the six had I waited till to-morrow, but I thought you might be looking for me, Señor; besides it will do them no harm to be short of their number."

"Have you no idea who is behind Morley? Who is supplying the sinews of war?" asked Robilliard, filling D'Arcy's glass.

"Why, the villain, the deceiver that married her in Captain Langley's place!"

"Yes, yes! of course! but have you no notion *who* he is?" asked Monteiro eagerly. "Does Morley still pretend to be the husband?"

"Well, he does in a transparent sort of way; who the real man is I cannot get at."

"But go on, D'Arcy; what more of the plan?" urged Monteiro.

"There is not much to tell, for you see, whatever is done will be done in a hurry. We have a carriage and five horses—one is a real good one, I do not know where he came from—in stables behind Hatton Garden; and after to-night we—that is Hardy Stevens and myself—are to be ready any moment, night or day, so maybe I will find it hard to give you warning, sir."

"But you must—you must!" said Monteiro, who was again pacing the room restlessly. "What is best to do in this juncture? Warn the Countess! she is in so strange a mood towards her niece that she might make it the excuse for restoring her to John Langley's charge! I wish to Heaven I had never seen her handsome face! I little thought when I fell in with her in Paris, that she had anything to do with the house of Langdale! Then if John Langley gets scent of it, he will demand his ward back to have her in safe keeping; and then God help them all! Maud—Mistress Langley I mean—will be

maddened with fear, and I shall have to slit the throats of both father and son."

"It might be the simplest way," said D'Arcy, in a calm and unaffected manner.

"But would not accomplish half my designs! Could I but keep all quiet, sweet Lady Maud under her aunt's care, and these conspirators at bay for four weeks—nay, but for three—I should have my appeal to the King, and then I have little fear but that all would go well for the heiress—for myself! Well, I have my sword and your promise, old friend!"

"Ay! but, Excellency, you must be recognized yourself?"

"Yes—that of course; but it will not mend my fortunes. But, sirrah!" (to D'Arcy) "where have you been since I sent you to Chifferil? Did you see him?"

"Yes, your honor, and took tay, or rather saw him taking tay, with two very civil gentlewomen, Mistress Sparrow and an old acquaintance of my own, faith! Mistress Dorothy Kean, own woman to Mistress Langley, no less; or my Lady Langdale I ought to say."

"How!" cried Monteiro, stopping short and turning to look at D'Arcy; "*you*, old Cut-and-thrust, drinking tea in such sober company!" he burst into laughter, then suddenly checking himself, he said sternly: "How came you to be so imprudent, man? You know how straitened I am to find trustworthy agents. How came you to show yourself to the Countess's household when you know I particularly wish you *not* to be identified with me?"

"Well, you see, Señor, I could not well help it; that limb of Satan, little Gomez—I don't think he knew me—bundled me right on top of them, just as they were brewing the tay; and may I never taste a drop of Nantes, if I did not think little Chifferil would have fainted! any way they were mighty civil. But Mistress Dorothy! she soon found me out; she offered to give me some of her savings to buy South Sea stock, so we had a little private talk;" and D'Arcy gave a solemn preternatural wink, at which, in spite of anger and uneasiness, Monteiro burst

again into hearty laughter, throwing himself into a chair as he did so.

"But tell me, D'Arcy," he said, recovering himself, "who is this Mistress Dorothy? is she fit to be about the person of the noble Baroness? How came you to know her?"

"Is it Dorothy? sure I have known her since she was a slip of a girl! Her father was killed at Limerick—she and a sister of hers were amongst them that escaped by the skin of their teeth. I was able to help them a bit. And Dorothy is come of decent people; the sister is dead and gone—(D'Arcy stopped for a moment), "but this girl—faith, I had better say elderly female—is true as steel. She would die for her lady. But they are in mortal fear of the fellow that she is married to; Mistress Dorothy asked me to stand by them, and so—" hesitating, "I just told her I might be heard of here."

"Scarcely prudent, D'Arcy. Did you caution her to be secret and careful?"

"Begad, there was no need of that, sir. They are all mortally afraid of the Countess; and, I was near forgetting, Dorothy told me that thief of an impostor has been writing to the young lady."

"Ha!" exclaimed Monteiro, with a sudden frown. "Did this Dorothy say the purport of the writing?"

"No, sir. She thought I had a hand in it, or she would not have named it; when she found I hadn't she shut her mouth."

"You must run no more risks, D'Arcy—avoid Mistress Dorothy."

"By Saint Jago, sir! I shall have to mind what I am about for the next few days. I shall be expected to be on the alert. Now here's my notion: there is an idea they can snatch up the young lady going into some grand entertainment, or coming out—have the carriage and horses at hand and five or six stout fellows to guard it, thrust her in, whip, spur and away! There is some determined spark behind the scenes and no lack of money."

"I would give half I have left to find out who," exclaimed Monteiro, resuming his restless walking to and fro; then,

looking at his watch, "My time is up—I have to return to my lodgings to dress for this confounded ridotto. Remember, D'Arcy, I rely on you for information; however you manage it, you must keep me acquainted with what goes on, either direct or through our friend here. You are too old a soldier not to be able to contrive this."

"Well, Señor, I will undertake it; but I warn you, be ready for a very sudden route."

"I shall always be ready. But, D'Arcy, I would not have you quit your company. Keep with them—you may thus be able to give the greatest help in the hour of need. Keep with the rascals, and keep well with them."

"I will, Captain! and it will go hard but an Irishman, and old soldier to boot, will not be more than a match for the lot."

"Good-night, then," returned Monteiro, wrapping himself in his cloak.

"I will not venture to leave with you," said D'Arcy, "for though I am not on duty to-night, Morley might see me, and I don't want to let him know that I have the private *entrée*, as they say at Versailles!"

"And look here, my son," cried Robilliard impulsively. "Forgive me, Excellency, but I have been looking back to the old times when you were a daring mischievous youngster, the plague of the whole ship's company. If you can but give me three or four hours' notice I will find a couple of trusty desperadoes, who will do my bidding and ask no questions."

"They might be very useful—see to them, brave old boy! We will beat John Langley yet, though he is backed up by the Admiralty." Returning the salutes of his companions, Monteiro hastily left the house.

The effect of Lord Chedworth's entertainment upon Maud Langley was exactly the reverse of what might have been expected with an ordinary girl, or even on a girl of somewhat exceptional nature under ordinary circumstances. But neither Maud Langley's nature nor circumstances could be thus classed. Oppressed with a sense

of her isolation and helplessness, she felt compelled to look below the glittering surface that surrounded her, and involuntarily recognized its delusiveness. No one seemed to her real or earnest, save her aunt and the puzzling Spanish gentleman, who, in some mysterious covert way, appeared to identify himself with her.

The reality of the former was far from pleasant or reassuring; the earnestness of the latter, if not disagreeable, was startling and oppressive. She felt that a continuance of the life she led would kill her. The outward monotony, the undercurrent of exciting expectation, seemed more than she could bear after the life of tranquillity and innocent occupation to which she had been accustomed. The very quietness and absence of John Langley alarmed her. Maud was a woman of tender nature, but streaked with a delicate pride, and strengthened by a certain high-strung energy capable of grand efforts, which, however, might greatly exhaust the fine exquisitely harmonious machinery that produced them.

The day after the party at Lord Chedworth's she had been so pale and listless that Dorothy was frightened. "Sure, my darling," she said, after their mid-day meal had been served (for the Countess had gone forth, early as was the season, with the restlessness peculiar then as now to the "fine lady," with a distinguished idle party to dine and frolic at Belsize House), "sure it's little good these grand tay-drinkings do ye if you look so ghost-like! Tell me, pulse of my heart, what ails ye?"

"Indeed nothing I can tell, dear Dorothy, but the terrible need of rest and safety. I thought I should find all with my aunt—but no! it does not feel safe even here. But she is a true gentlewoman, Dorothy. It seems to me that just a trifle more of, I know not what, and I could love her well. I would she loved me! as it is, I must give all my love to *you*, dear Dorothy."

"Ay, do! my darlin'!" returned Dorothy, with droll cynicism. "I'll keep it all safe till ye want to take some away—and that you will be sure to do—only leave me a thrifle, alannah! You were mighty late last night—lie down a bit and try to sleep."

"Oh! I could not sleep, Dorothy, though I was so weary of everything at Lord Chedworth's, which was wrong—nay, wicked—of me, for all were courteous and kind."

"Ah! small blame to them! Why should they not show every attention to the Baroness Langdale—and an elegant young lady besides?"

"My good nurse? few think of me save as the dependent niece of the noble Countess of Helmsford."

"Well, well! this world's for the wicked."

"Still I should like a little share in it," said Maud, smiling; "and, Dorothy, I *will* take your advice and lie down awhile."

"Yes, do, my darlin'! but I mustn't forget to tell you we had an elegant dish of tay with Mistress Sparrow last night, and who should come in but a gentleman for Master Chifferil—his man of business, no less, what buys him bits of paper to cheat the world with. Well, he was mighty tall and straight, and I thought I knew the turn of him, so I looked hard, and, oh, me darling! all the memories that came drifting over me like a flood! It was a man that saved me and me sweet sister from death or worse, near thirty years ago, at the siege of Limerick! a boy that we used to play with by the Shannon—ah, years and years ago!"

"How strange, Dorothy!" cried Maud, drawing her tenderly to her, for she saw the tears in her nurse's keen gray eyes; "and did he know you?"

"Ay, that he did!" cried Dorothy, "and I managed to have a talk with him, and it is my belief he was somehow sent to spy after you; for, ses he, 'Dorothy, your lady has a strong and watchful friend!'"

"Ah, heavens!" cried Maud, clutching Dorothy's hand, "do you think, is it possible, he was sent by that gentleman?"

"What! the Langdale man? Troth no, I am sure he wasn't; but he is a brave fellow, and ready to do you a service. Moreover I know where to find him—so take heart, my darlin'."

- “I will, Dorothy—I will e’en say my prayers and try to sleep.”

So the faithful nurse left her, and Maud lay back in a luxurious chair, still and silent, but not asleep. No ; her thoughts were active. What if this man were an emissary of her bridegroom ? what if he—unseen, unknown—watched over her ? What more charming subject for a girl’s day-dream ? Some one kind and fair and frank, something like herself, only bolder ; something like her dear father, only younger—with whom all would be clear and open, no more fear or mystery, but candor and affection, and, if it came, even poverty—though poverty was scarce known or recognized then by a demoiselle of high degree. It meant a carriage, but less than six footmen ; a fashionable dress, but, perhaps, no diamonds ; one woman attendant instead of three or four—but loss of station, of the observances due to birth, *that* was impossible, when the *canaille* were as inferior as the colored races to a free American.

Even with this tender curiosity as to whom and what her unknown husband could be, came the recollection of Monteiro’s entreating tones when he asked how he was so unfortunate as to offend her. Why did he care for her favor when Lady Helmsford evidently looked upon him as her own property ? And Lady Helmsford was not so much older than him really. Of course Maud knew her age ; she was thirty-nine or forty, and looked six or seven years younger—not more than eight or nine years older than Monteiro—and she was beautiful and charming ; why should Don Juan *not* love her ? Yet Maud felt he did not. Here reflection became confused, and welcome refreshing sleep stole over the young orphan, who woke with a resolution to implore her aunt that she might remain *perdu* for some time to come, till something more definite had evolved itself from the painful chaos by which she was enveloped.

The Countess of Helmsford, meantime, had seldom had a more uncomfortable day, albeit the weather had apparently suited itself to the whims of the aristocratic pleasure-seekers.

The party had been talked of the evening before, and Monteiro had been invited to join. He had made some ambiguous answer and never appeared, so the dinner and the music, the "strange birds" and romantic walks, the freedom and unconventionality which were among the chief charms of that doubtful delightful place, Belsize House, were thrown away on her ladyship, as were also the pains taken by the proprietors to provide "twelve stout fellows, fully armed, to patrol between Belsize and London, to insure the safety of visitors," as stated at the foot of their advertisement.

Maud and Dorothy had long retired to rest when Lady Helmsford returned from the Duchess of B——'s rout. The experienced Beville knew by the way her ladyship threw aside her fan and held out her arm to have her bracelets unfastened, that she was in one of her "moods," as the household expressed it.

"Will your ladyship take aught before you retire to rest?" asked the cautious Beville, who was not seldom honored with a sort of contemptuous confidence, and who hitherto, in the absence of any strong temptation to be otherwise, had been secret and discreet, the Countess being well liked, as well as profoundly feared by her servants.

"No! Beville. I have had enough to digest to-day."

Beville only said, "Indeed, my lady;" and Lady Helmsford, permitting her to remove her sacque and hair ornaments in perfect silence, sat down before the dressing-table, and, leaning her elbows on it, covered her face with her hands.

"I do not think you are a gossip, Beville," she said at last, "and I *do* think you have more brains than any other of my household."

"I am sure your ladyship does me honor," said Beville, dropping a curtsy.

"Show your wit by holding your tongue," resumed the Countess. "I *must* speak of some matters, respecting which I have none to consult. Have you seen Don Juan di Monteiro since he came to town?"

"I have, my lady."

"And what did he say to you? Speak—and speak truly!"

The Countess turned quickly as she said this, and looked full into Beville's face with such eager—almost fierce—eyes, that Beville thought they must read her inmost mind.

"The first time I saw him, my lady, was in your dressing-room one morning when you received at your levée; then he gave me good-day very pleasantly. The next time I was crossing the hall as he was going out, and he stopped me and asked me if I remembered him in Paris, and said as how my beautiful mistress was as charming as ever, and gave me a gold piece 'for old acquaintance' sake," he said."

"And was this all?" cried Lady Helmsford. "No more?"

"No more—I never saw him since."

"'For old acquaintance' sake," he said," repeated the Countess slowly, remaining in the same position as when she had turned to look at her woman—resting her head on one hand, which was half lost among the luxuriant black hair Beville had just released from its trappings, while the open sleeve of her dressing-gown fell back from a finely-molded, round, firm, white arm, that could embrace passionately or strike ruthlessly. "For old acquaintance' sake, Beville! That looked as if he needed no new service. What do you think?"

"That it was not a bad lead, my lady, whether he did or did not," replied the shrewd Beville, watching her lady's countenance from under her half-shut eyes.

"True, Beville, true!" The Countess's tone was more hopeful as she uttered this, and a long pause ensued; Lady Helmsford and her attendant preserved the same attitude. "The gentleman is much changed since I saw him in Paris. Do you remember him there, Beville?"

"I do well, my lady! The gayest, the most dashing and open-handed of all the cavaliers that used to frequent your hotel during those autumn months. Why, your ladyship used to say—but, pardon me, perhaps I

ought not to remember—" and Beville, feeling her way, paused.

"Speak—speak without reserve," cried Lady Helmsford.

"Your ladyship used to laugh and say that of all the sparks you had ever met, Don Monteiro was the hardest to keep at a distance, that he had the fire of youth and the audacity of middle age."

"True, Beville! The daring of maturity without the coarseness that too often accompanies it. Well, I have no such complaints to make now. Our murky climate appears to exercise a most refrigerating effect upon the Don. I can in no way account for the change. If he were evidently taken up with any other woman I could understand it, but he is not. That handsome creature, Lady Sarah Bellamy, and even Mistress Carthew, bestow unbounded encouragement on him; still his largest share of attention is for myself. But the difference between what it *was* and what it *is*, I alone can recognize. No! I have no rival in my own sphere. Is it possible that Monteiro can be led away by the charm of some obscure female? Impossible! He is in his way fastidious." The Countess rose and walked slowly to the fireplace.

"Ah! how I loathe the common humanity that makes such an insult possible!" she exclaimed, with indescribable haughtiness. "To think that a man who might win *my* favor, could ever deign to look at one beneath me!"

"'Tis indeed amazing!" ejaculated Beville, with becoming humility, while in the inner consciousness of the common humanity which her mistress loathed, she could not resist the sneer suggested by certain recollections.

"However, we women of rank have no need to know or regard these aberrations of diseased fancy," resumed Lady Helmsford. "One thing I have observed, there is a stern thoughtfulness about Monteiro he used not to have. It ages him and becomes him well."

"Perhaps the young gentleman hath lost heavily at play," suggested Beville.

"He is not so young," said Lady Helmsford tartly. "*But what you say* is possible. He supped last week

with the Duke of Wharton, and the gambling there is fearful ! Yes, he may have lost heavily ; but then he was changed from the first hour I beheld him in this accursed town. But for this, Beville, I should have listened to the vague unreasonable doubts which have sometimes darted through my heart, that he is attracted to my niece, Maud, that there is some undefinable sympathy between them. But no ! He was changed and cold before he ever saw her. "Twould be strange," continued the Countess, as if speaking to herself, "strange indeed if I were robbed alike by mother and daughter."

Not understanding to what her lady alluded, Mistress Beville prudently kept silence.

"Be the reason what it may, Beville," Lady Helmsford went on, sinking as she spoke into a low chair before the fire, "I have no power, no hold over Monteiro. Though he continues to seek me, he has with marvelous adroitness slid from the gay audacious lover into an easy complimentary friend. But I will not accept the exchange ; no—I will have all or nothing ! There is something under all this I cannot understand, some favor to be had from the King, some scheme personal or political which he will not confide to me—and I might be of so much assistance to him." Again the Countess relapsed into silence and thought, her jeweled fingers interlaced and clasped round one knee, gazing into the depths of the fire with strained burning eyes.

"That I am sure your ladyship could well be," said Beville softly, to recall her to spoken thought.

"One speech of Don Juan's has dwelt in my mind," said Lady Helmsford, answering to the spur. "He said to Lord Chedworth that he desired nothing more than to become an Englishman and wed some English heiress. Think you, Beville, he covets the position of my husband ? a share of my fortune ?"

"La ! my lady," almost screamed Beville, "you would never think of that—a foreigner—a—a—the Lord knows who ! You that have refused so many noblemen !"

"True, my good Beville ! I have always preferred a

lover to a husband, 'tis infinitely more agreeable ; but—but, Beville—Don Juan is a man of honor ; he would be grateful to me, and gratitude counts for much in a nature like his. Then the disparity of our age is not great ; moreover, he looks older than his years, and I younger than mine."

"Oh, as to that, your ladyship doesn't look a day too old for him—I mean he doesn't look a day too young for you. But just think of letting the grip of everything out of your own fingers ! and as to gratitude, what man was ever grateful to the woman he marries ?"

"I might keep much in my own hands," said the Countess, as if speaking to herself. "Twould be a splendid means of naturalization in this country. He is well connected, too, in France and Spain, though I cannot make out his exact lineage. He has a sister married to a noble of Provence ; but what care I for lineage or anything ?" cried Lady Helmsford, suddenly starting up and stretching out her grand beautiful arms. "I love him as I never loved but once before ! He has restored my youth, and youth's possibilities of joy. Death and destruction to whatever or whoever stands between us !" and Lady Helmsford, disregarding in her fierce momentary passion the humble confidante who listened in great surprise and some terror to this outburst, rushed back to the toilet-table, and bending the glass till it reflected her face closely, she gazed into it for a few moments. "I am still handsome," she murmured, "handsomer than when a younger woman, and I must be more fitted for companionship than an unfledged birdling, all smiles and blushes and uncertain moods ; yet—yet—what terrible attraction there is in youth !—the one rivalry that might undo me. But I will not think of it. If he is in debt I will set him free ! If he wants position I will be his wife ! I will bind him to me by the close ties of benefit and gratitude, and, come what may, I'll never loose my hold."

"Ay, my lady—when you have got it," said Beville, roused by the sight of her mistress's passion into sincerity.

"What do you mean?" cried Lady Helmsford, turning wrathfully upon her; "speak, woman!"

"Why, your ladyship said a few minutes back that you had no power—no hold—over this gentleman now."

"I will gain it, Beville, I will win it! Am I a woman to be despised?"

"La! my lady! you are ever so much too good for the best man among them. But suppose this young gentleman—gentleman I mean—has, out of perversity, gone and pledged himself to some other lady. There were good two months he was out of sight—"

"God help her, Beville!" said the Countess in a low concentrated voice; "God help her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"MY lady would be glad of Mistress Langley's company at breakfast," was the message brought next day to Maud, some time after Dorothy and herself had dispatched their morning meal.

Maud had set forth her music. She enjoyed playing over the sonatas and airs of Paesello and Cherubini. Nothing stood her in such good stead as music. It carried her away from the present and made her forget to look forward with dread. She rose, however, very willingly, and followed Mistress Beville to her aunt's dressing-room.

Lady Helmsford was quite in dishabille. She looked pale and worn without her rouge, yet something unusual of softness or sadness in her expression, made her seem charming in Maud's eyes.

"Come here, child," she said, holding out her hand with a smile. "I have not seen you since Lord Chedworth's party. My time, you see, is little at my own disposal. However, I have many things to speak of to you—sit down and share my breakfast."

"I thank you, madam; I have already eaten mine."

"Another cup of chocolate will do you good. Set

it there, Beville, and leave us. What do you do, Maud, these long, long days when you are alone? Do you mope?"

"I have sad thoughts sometimes, dear madam—then I read, and you have kindly placed a harpsichord in my room—music is a great relief—then there is my needle."

"Does this satisfy you, Maud? have you no ambition?"

"I scarce know," returned Maud thoughtfully. "I think I have had dreams long ago that might have been 'ambition,' but it was more for my father than myself; now I only pray to be delivered from the doubt and dread of the present."

"What is your idea of life?" cried the Countess, looking keenly at her.

"After one's duty to God, giving and receiving pleasure," exclaimed Maud promptly; "a freer life than this; open air, and friends and fearlessness! Indeed, dear aunt, if you would but send me back to—"

"Tush!" interrupted the Countess impatiently, "*that* is impossible. But you are a strange girl! *how* unlike me—nevertheless I cannot help liking you: could you love me, fair niece?"

"Ah! in truth I could," cried Maud warmly; "but you must give me *your* love, then I will open my heart to you."

"A magnificent bribe," quoth the Countess, not unkindly. "But I have a right to your confidence."

Maud blushed. "No doubt you have, nor would I do anything without your knowledge and approval; but, madam, obedience and honesty are a long way from opening out one's heart."

"Well, let me see if I can unlock it," returned the Countess gently. "Is it not strange," she resumed after a moment's pause, "that your guardian leaves you here unmolested, even though his son does not receive the warmest welcome from either of us? Trust me, he is brewing mischief—only he must go cunningly to work. However, if he is daring and unscrupulous, even *I* cannot protect you."

"Nay, but he will not venture to touch me while I am with you?"

"I am not so sure of that! Nevertheless, there is a certain way of escape for you, child. I have this morning received from Lord Chedworth a formal offer of his hand in marriage."

"Is it possible?" cried Maud, much amused.

"You smile; but accept his lordship and your fears and difficulties are at an end. He is wealthy, powerful, and will be devoted to you; as Viscountess Chedworth you may laugh at John Langley and cast your doubtful heritage to the winds."

"But, my aunt, what am I to do with my first husband?" asked Maud, still smiling.

"Pooh! we shall soon dispose of him—see my lawyer to-day, join me in giving him instructions, and that obstacle will soon be swept away; I speak for your own happiness and good, child; 'tis the only way I see for you to avoid all difficulties and quit you of Harold Langley. Sure you would prefer my Lord Chedworth to that low-bred fop?"

"Infinitely, madam, were my choice limited to them, but—"

"How?" cried Lady Helmsford; "are you so bewitched by a dream—an unsubstantial vision—as to reject a sober advantageous reality? Come, Maud, open your heart to me in this matter, I will be patient and indulgent with you; alas! we foolish women ought to bear with one another's follies. Speak! say what you really want and wish respecting this unlucky marriage."

"Only that you should have patience, dear aunt, and let me wait that gentleman's coming. I know—I feel he will appear, and if he is good and wise, why should I not give him the chance if he likes to claim me?"

"The truth is you have given the reins to your imagination and fancy yourself in love with this phantom; speak to me honestly, dear niece!" Lady Helmsford's tone was unusually kind; she felt a curious dim, yet anxious longing to be convinced that Maud *had* indulged a girl's romantic natural dream; it would be a

security against the possible rivalry, a dread of which at times would glance through her brain in spite of reason and her own rejection of it. "Speal to me," she repeated, holding out her hand, which Maud gratefully kissed, and retaining a moment or two, drew nearer and seated herself by her aunt's side.

"I could tell you everything when you speak to me thus!" she exclaimed, "and I will try to put what I feel into words, though I can scarce give it clear expression. I think, oh! so much of that gentleman! you must own, dear madam, I owe him a great debt; but for him I would be now these three months Harold Langley's wife—if, indeed, I still lived—and life is strong in one as young as I am. Thanks to him I am free! and I do confess that I earnestly hope he will prove a true gentleman—honest, kindly, noble, such as I could fondly love, and so, in some measure, repay him the service he has done me! but at the first sight of him I may be disenchanted, and only wish to be delivered from my chains; and he—I have no right to suppose he means anything save kindly help and protection; the only words he ever spoke to me promised release, that is all I can tell—all I can find in my heart; I do not love him, but I wish to do so. In truth, I shall be grieved if I cannot."

"He must prove a monster of stupidity and unattractiveness if, when so fair a breach is already made in the citadel of your heart, he does not enter in and dwell there," said Lady Helmsford meditatively. "Tell me, what is your own theory about this man and your marriage, for you have one, of course?"

"I have thought of so many things, but my prevailing idea is, that this gentleman was some friend and comrade of my dear father, who, hearing him often speak of me, felt interested in my forlorn state, and knowing of the plot against me—perhaps knowing more of Captain Langley's unfitness than we do, he, not being able to take open action, devised this method of defeating my uncle's plans."

"'Tis not so improbable an explanation of the mystery," returned the Countess. "But if this man were a

comrade of your father's, Maud, he would be somewhat ancient for a lover?"

"Scarce so old as my Lord Chedworth," said Maud demurely.

"True," replied Lady Helmsford, laughing; "but I proposed *him* as a husband—not a lover; 'tis a different thing."

"Oh! dear aunt, I earnestly hope to find them the same."

"The ways of the world will not change for you, child; what then shall I say to Lord Chedworth?"

"Tell him, with all kindness and courtesy, that I thank him heartily, but do not feel I ought to accept more than I can give; that is, if you will not tell him simply that I am wed, and will take no step towards loosening the bonds until I know more."

"And this is indeed your determination!" said Lady Helmsford, much struck by her niece's resolute tone; "well, I shall write something such as you wish, leave it to me;" and her ladyship made up her mind so to pen the rejection of the elderly suitor as to leave him a bait of hope and keep him in reserve if it was necessary to resign all hopes of Langdale and break with the Langley's; "for," thought the foreseeing dame, "it would never do to have this dainty demoiselle my inmate should I wed Monteiro."

The silence preserved by the Countess while she thus reflected was unbroken by Maud, who fondly hoped that kindly and wise considerations for her own welfare occupied her aunt's thoughts, but it was interrupted by the entrance of Gomez, who, with one or two curious duckings of the head—intended for bows—advanced and presented a billet to the Countess, who took it with a gracious smile, and, glancing at the direction, selected with her own fair hand a large lump from the sugar-basin, and handed it to the little fellow, who proceeded with an air of much enjoyment to crunch it audibly, while the Countess opened the note and read as follows, her smile fading away as she did so:

"DEAR AND HONORED LADY,

"I thank you heartily for giving me the chance of being your companion in a visit to the theater on Friday as I could not go to-night, but, unfortunate that I am, I have also an appointment of importance for that evening which I must not forego. In truth, pleasure and myself have parted company since the bright days we knew in Paris, and I am scarce worth the notice of so lovely a dame, till, having accomplished a grave undertaking of which I hope later to give you an account, I am more like my former self, and a little more worthy to be,

"Your ever devoted friend,

"JUAN DI MONTEIRO."

Lady Helmsford read this enigmatical epistle through twice before she raised her eyes. When she did she beheld Gomez contemplating her with a sort of delighted grin that anger, or vexation in others, generally drew from him. To start from her seat and administer a thundering box on the ear which sent Gomez howling out of the room, was the work of a second, and then, regardless of Maud, who had risen from her seat, her cheek crimson with shame at an exhibition so widely different from the sober, dignified self-control she had been trained to consider the characteristic of a gentlewoman, the Countess stood still, her hand yet clutching the paper but dropped by her side, and her eyes wide open with the strained look that shows the present surroundings are unseen in the far-off vision of distant things.

Maud, greatly embarrassed, kept silence, and after a few unpleasant moments, the Countess, with a slight shivering sigh, recalled herself, and turning from her niece to the fire, exclaimed :

"I have letters to write—much—much to do ! so leave me, child, and—give me your company at dinner to-day, we shall probably be alone—go—I will write to my Lord Chedworth, and—but leave me now."

Maud, curtsying gracefully to her aunt's back and sweeping robe, slowly withdrew—full of sympathy, which *she did not dare to express*, for whatever grief or annoy-

ance the unlucky note had cost her variable protectress.

"Dear Dorothy," she cried as she reached the haven of their secluded sitting-room, "I have had a most happy interview! I have never known my aunt so kind! trust me she has a good heart, 'tis her temper that is a trifle uncertain, and none can tell what secret sources of trial she may have."

"True—true for ye, honey! Anyhow she has had one of the sorest trials all her life long—and that is her own way in everything."

"Yes! I suppose it is a sore temptation to our unruly wills and affections," returned Maud, smiling; "at least it is a temptation I am spared, for I have not my own way in anything."

"Not yet, astore! but we don't know what's coming."

That whole day Lady Helmsford passed in her own chamber. She was indisposed—she had caught cold in her expedition to Belsize House—she doubted if she could join the Princess's card-table that evening. Long and deeply did she ponder upon Monteiro's oft-conned note. Not more resolutely and ingeniously does the vine-root twine itself through interstices and round obstacles to reach the water which is its life, than does self-love send forth its feelers to reach the balm of flattering explanation for what has wounded it. Thus the Countess concentrated her notice on the passage in which Monteiro declared himself pre-occupied by a grave undertaking, to learn what this was, and associate herself with it, to prove her own power and ability, her capacity for giving help, as well as for bestowing pleasure; this was her determination. She would change her tactics—she would become dignified and retiring—she would efface the impression that she had intended a *lête-à-lête* dinner and visit to the theater with Monteiro (and he would have been dull of comprehension if he had not received that impression), by arranging a quiet family party to the play the same night—of which Monteiro would no doubt hear. She must gather up the threads of her life, and so arrange

a breathing-space, in which to weave her meshes round the slippery Spaniard.

"I cannot quarrel with John Langley yet," she thought; "and I have been somewhat negligent of the son. I will ask him to dine with Maud and myself to-day; 'tis an honor that might well make him forget a hundred omissions."

So it came about that Maud's dinner with her aunt, to which she had looked forward as the cementing of their new friendship, was a terrible disappointment; though the Countess, having decided on her line, braced herself up to perform her part so well, that her agreeable conversation, suave yet dignified manner, and judicious unseen help, made Harold less odious to Maud than he had ever seemed before, and sent that young officer away in high good-humor with himself, and determined to prove his own spirit and gallantry by carrying out to the letter his father's crafty plot.

"I had it on my tongue, Maud," said Lady Helmsford, as the door closed on him, "to invite your *fiancée* to accompany us to the play; but I think we have sacrificed enough to expediency. Have you ever seen a play, child?"

"Never, dear madam! never!" cried Maud, her eyes sparkling; "but I do greatly long to see one. Are you going to be so very good as to take me?"

"I am," said Lady Helmsford, smiling; "to-morrow night you shall see both Wilkes and the charming Mrs. Booth at Drury Lane. I will take Sparrow, too; let us do the domestic for once. It will be a rest for me, and if we require beaux to escort us to our carriage, we will find enough and to spare."

"It will be delightful, dear aunt. One grace more—let me rest quiet and hidden in your house—take me to no more routs or entertainments while my fortunes are so uncertain—they oppress me!"

"Well, Maud, I shall try to meet your wishes, and now I think I must dress and attend her Royal Highness's card-party, so good-night, child; sleep well, and *do not dream of the mysterious stranger!*"

Maud laughed, blushed, and was gone.

"Tell me," said Lady Helmsford to the new footman who answered the bell, "who has called to-day?"

"My Lord Chedworth, Sir Eustace Blount, the Duchess of B——, Lady Sarah Bellamy and a foreign gentleman, Mrs. Farrers, the Marchioness of——"

"Enough! Who was the foreign gentleman?"

"Don Something, my lady; I'm somewhat bad at foreign names, but he called twice, and was much concerned to hear you were indisposed!"

"Let the carriage be brought round," returned the Countess, as if she did not heed, and she slowly walked away towards her dressing-room, pleased with herself for her resolution in excluding Monteiro. "'Tis the only plan," she thought; "let him begin to doubt his power over me, and he will strive to rivet it again. I will give him no chance of joining us to-morrow night, and it would be wiser perhaps to yield to Maud's wishes, and let her seclude herself till her shadowy bridegroom comes to claim her!"

Maud was far too young and light-hearted by nature not to forget her griefs and anxieties, at least for a while, in delighted anticipation of witnessing a play.

"I do wish you might come, Dorothy! but you shall go some day—I think matters will turn out better than we expect: I feel more light hearted than ordinary. Well, I will notice everything and try and make a picture for you when I return; and Dorothy, the Countess says I must wear my Indian muslin, and see! she has presented me with this beautiful diamond clasp for my throat—is it not sparkling? sew it safely on the velvet, Dorothy, for this must be my crown jewel."

"It's a mighty pretty thing! and I am sure my lady is growing ever so fond of you; sure I always said she would."

"Did you, Dorothy? I don't remember."

The expected hour of delight came at last. Again Maud dined with the Countess, sharing that honor with

Mistress Sparrow, who wore the costume prescribed by her mistress, and looked to unusual advantage in gray and black.

Lady Helmsford, though somewhat silent and *distrail*, was nevertheless placid and gracious ; she had directed the intelligent Beville to be in the way when visitors called, and (if he was amongst them) to encounter Don Juan accidentally. This she had accomplished, and described him as most solicitous respecting her ladyship's health, and also anxious to know if she was to remain at home that evening. Beville declared she could not positively say, but she imagined her lady would not go out. "Now," thought the Countess, "if in spite of his important appointment he contrives to call in the hope of finding me alone, it will be a proof he has not quite shaken off old feelings." But Mistress Beville, for some reason of her own, perhaps a reluctance to disturb the peacefulness which seemed so unexpectedly to have revisited her lady, suppressed the fact that Monteiro had carefully inquired if Mistress Langley was to accompany the Countess should she go out. This Beville assured him she would not, as she had heard her mistress say it was that young lady's intention to remain at home, and not appear in public for the future.

In due course the carriage was announced as ready, and, wrapping themselves in their warm cardinal cloaks, the three ladies took their places in the carriage and set forth, escorted by four or five footmen with torches besides the coachmen and those swinging on the footboard, for the journey from St. James's Square to Drury Lane was no small undertaking. The dangers of the deserted and rutty Strand were wisely avoided by her ladyship's coachman, who directed his horses through Pall Mall, the Haymarket, Leicester Fields, and Long Acre, to the attractive theater.

The aspect of the house was very new and exciting to the young novice, who now beheld such a scene for the first time. The pit crowded by men, the critics and more *finely* dressed gentlemen having pushed to the front near *the musicians*, the gaily attired ladies embellished by the

brilliant light of innumerable wax candles. Before the Countess could point out half that was worth notice the curtain drew up, and thenceforward Maud had eyes only for the stage. She wept at the pathos, and laughed merrily at the drolleries. Between the first and second acts a distinguished party entered the stage-box.

"Look, Maud," said the Countess, touching her with her fan, "there is the Princess of Wales—that tall stately lady just sitting down ; and that bright saucy looking girl with reddish hair in the green sacque, with an amethyst comb, is Mistress Mary Bellenden, one of the maids of honor ; she is much admired. See ! she turns her head, smiling, to speak to a dark-looking gentleman ; he is Lord Lumley. I must take you to Leicester House one of these days when the mystery that at present enwraps you is a little cleared."

Maud looked, and admired, and wondered. The house was handsome and well-proportioned. It was the edifice designed and built by Sir Christopher Wren after the first theater was burned, and considered the finest in London. The complete change in the current of Maud's thoughts, created by the interest and novelty of all around her, produced the best effect. She forgot the gloom and helplessness of her position, and saw only the bright surroundings of the society amid which her birth gave her the right to mingle. Thus for the moment she felt that the mists of to-day *must* melt and vanish before the warmth and brilliancy which environed without absolutely touching her.

Many noblemen and gentlemen came to pay their respects to Lady Helmsford ; but, whether from respect to her niece's wish for obscurity or any other motive, the Countess did not present them to Maud, who amused herself, when not absorbed in the performance, by secretly comparing them with the ideal she had formed of her husband, and earnestly hoped he would resemble *none*. She felt a little surprised, too, that Monteiro did not make his appearance. She had never before accompanied her aunt into society without meeting him. However, Lady Helmsford's ease of manner and tran-

quillity showed that she expected no visitor to her box beyond the ordinary fine gentlemen who presented themselves.

Between the second and third acts the dark man whom Lady Helmsford had pointed out to Maud as Lord Lumley came to join them, and with ceremonious politeness requested the Countess, on the part of the Princess, to pay her a visit in her box, and return with her to sup. Of course such an invitation was a command ; and Lady Helmsford rose at once to comply. "Stay here till the end of the performance," she said to Mistress Sparrow ; "the servants shall let you know when the carriage is waiting. As soon as you are safe at home let it return to Leicester House for me." She smiled kindly to Maud, who again settled herself for unbroken enjoyment of the coming scenes ; so absorbed was she that she started, and at first could scarcely understand, when Mistress Sparrow touched her arm, and said that Lady Helmsford had sent for her, she supposed to give some additional directions, and that she would return immediately. Maud, half turning, saw one of her aunt's servants standing in the doorway, and concluding he had brought the message, she returned to her contemplation of the stage, observing that Lady Helmsford, whom she had noticed speaking to the Princess when she had at first joined the royal party, had retired to the back of the box, out of sight.

It might have been five minutes, or quarter of an hour, or longer, for she did not think of time when wrapped in the sorrows of the fascinating "first lady," after Mistress Sparrow had been called away, when the same footman again presented himself : "Mistress Sparrow begs you will not be uneasy, madam, but my lady, the Countess, is somewhat indisposed, and about to return home. She begs you will join her immediately."

Maud, much alarmed, and knowing enough of courtly manners to conjecture how serious indisposition must be when it dared to disturb royal arrangements, quickly wrapped her cloak round her, and followed the man, who walked rapidly through passages comparatively de-

sented, to the staircase and the doorway, where the link-boys and some of the lower sort of theatrical officials were shouting, "My Lady Helmsford's carriage stops the way." Through the entrance Maud could see the open door and steps of a coach. "My lady and Mistress Sparrow are already entered, and awaiting you," said the footman. Maud, anxious about her aunt, and somewhat abashed by the numerous eyes fixed upon her, went hastily forward, and sprang up the steps into the vehicle.

The instant she had done so the steps were huddled up, the door slammed-to with much vehemence, and the coach started off rapidly, with fearful joltings and swayings to and fro. But, almost before the door closed, Maud knew she was entrapped. No Countess, no Mistress Sparrow, answered to her eager terrified cry. She felt round her—she was alone. The rough covering of the seat, the indescribable musty atmosphere of the conveyance, so different from the perfumed luxury of her aunt's—all these indications paralyzed her with fear. She strove to let down the windows; they were fastened, and outside was the blackness of a very dark night. She thought she could distinguish the figure of a man on horseback beside the right-hand window: she screamed as loudly as she could, but her cry was probably unheard—certainly unheeded. Still they sped on with desperate headlong haste, which Maud thought must certainly overturn the crazy vehicle. She clasped her hands tightly together, and breathed a fervent prayer; then with wonderful force and courage strove to collect her thoughts and marshal her resources, that she should be sufficiently cool to take whatever chance of escape might offer, or at least not disgrace herself by acting as if distraught by abject terror.

Within the theater all went on tranquilly for nearly an hour after Maud had been drawn away; Lady Helmsford, sitting at the back where she could not view the house, exchanged whispered repartee and compliments with Lord Lumley and others in attendance on the Princess; at length one of the gentlemen having leant forward to look

at something specially attractive, observed, "Your ladyship's party has already retired."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Countess, "even if the carriage were announced, my niece, Mistress Langley, is too much fascinated to leave the house while an actor is left on the stage."

"They are gone nevertheless."

Lady Helmsford rose, went forward and reconnoitered for herself: "May I beg you will be so good as to inquire if my carriage and my people are here, and if Mistress Langley is unwell, or anything occurred?" she said uneasily. The gentleman to whom she spoke left the box, and soon returned with the startling intelligence that her ladyship's equipage and servants were awaiting her orders, but that the people round the entrance said that her coach had been called quite half-an-hour ago, and that a young lady had gone away in it.

"Then where is Sparrow?" exclaimed the Countess in dire distress and anger. Despite of etiquette and its rigidity, Lady Helmsford broke from the royal group, and soon every man of note in the house was around her—messengers of high and low degree, officials of the theater, every one that could by possibility be of any use was pressed into the service, and sent north, south, east, and west in search of the robbers and their prey.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Monteiro called at St. James's Square on the morning of this eventful day, he was surprised and disappointed to find that the Countess had gone out. Having been denied the previous morning, he had counted surely on admittance, and though it was but occasionally that he found Maud with her aunt, still there was the chance of doing so, and he had not seen her for nearly four days—while, through all those long dreary hours, he had been haunted by the delightful reflection of her *delicate spiritual beauty*—the painful puzzling recollec-

tion of her coldness and perceptible change from the frank confidential tone in which she used to speak to him.

"I do not deserve it," he thought; "some one has been making mischief—possibly the Countess herself! What a misfortune that I should have known that woman! Yet had I not, how should I have known her sweetest fairest niece? I thought her ladyship's whim in favor of my unworthy self would have been diverted by some new fancy long ago! What a crowning embarrassment it adds to the rest! Shall I dare to call again late, and try my chance? No, it might convey a wrong impression to the Countess. I must beware of even the semblance of double dealings! Does Maud Langley accuse me of it in her heart? or does she dream that I am her lover? No! she thinks of no lover! She has had enough to frighten her from all thoughts of love. Shall I ever be able to win her—and ought I? Bah! who will love her as well—or care for her so fondly as I do? But I am in the mid-stream of circumstance, I must strike out boldly for shore or I shall be lost!" thus thought Monteiro, as, after his interview with Beville, he was slowly rowed from Westminster stairs to Chelsea, in order to ascertain himself, at Sir Stephen Compton's residence, when its owner was expected in England.

Having accomplished this errand he returned to his lodgings and determined to remain indoors and write letters. A nameless expectation and uneasiness rendered him unwilling to be absent from his lodgings, though the assurance he had received that Mistress Langley was to remain safely at home made such sensations, he told himself, unreasonable.

Still time went heavily. About seven o'clock, his valet ushered in a rare visitor, the little negro boy, Gomez.

Gomez laughed and kissed Monteiro's hand and expressed much joy at seeing his former master, and after some minutes spent thus, Monteiro thought of dismissing the little fellow, when it suddenly occurred to him that so unusual an event as a visit from Gomez required explanation.

"Tell me," said Monteiro, "did your lady send you to me, Gomez—have you any letter or message?"

"No—none—only Señor Chifferil had told him to go and see his former master, and be sure to tell him that the Countess and Mistress Langley had gone forth to the theater—a theater not far off—something Lane."

"Ha!" exclaimed Monteiro, "I will go there at once—Chifferil fears something—I will not stop to change my dress." He was still in his walking attire and boots. "I can hang about the entrance," he thought, "till I see her safe in Lady Helmsford's carriage." So thinking, he summoned Victor, and began to fasten on his sword which he had laid aside. He was giving his valet directions to see that little Gomez had supper before he left, when the man who acted as general factotum of the house knocked at the door, and said there was a rough fellow below like a stable-boy, who insisted on seeing Don Monteiro, as he had a letter to be delivered into his own hand.

"Send him up to the next room!" exclaimed Monteiro, and taking a light from the table went to meet him.

The bearer of the note was indeed a ragged-looking creature—bare-headed and bare-foot.

"The gentleman said as how he should be rewarded if he gave the note into the hand of him who could tell him the best kind of grain."

"Rye!" exclaimed Monteiro eagerly.

"Right, your honor! here's the billet."

Monteiro saw D'Arcy's strange hieroglyphics on the paper, and hastily snatching it from the rude messenger, bestowed a piece of silver on him and motioned to him to begone. With a caper of delight he obeyed, and Monteiro tearing open the letter read these half-illegible sentences:

"To-night is fixed on at the Theater Drury Lane, a carriage and four ready with three fellows besides myself (*two of them mounted*) to guard it, others to join in the

Strand, as the route is to lie that way to Chelsea and I know not where. I will stick to them—try and stop us before the others join.

“H. D’A.”

Monteiro read—his soul in his eyes—then rushed back to the room he had quitted, and hastily opening a cabinet or press, began to fasten a foreign-looking sash round his waist.

“Victor,” he exclaimed, “my pistols! all of them. Can you fight like the devil? stand by me now, and I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Ventre St. Gris!” exclaimed the valet, “I am with you, Monsieur; I was a fencing master once.”

“Look to the loading of these pistols!” exclaimed his master, “put a belt round you, and stick a brace in; and here, take this sword, it’s a strong one—now a mask. Are you ready? Gomez!” A short stern injunction to the boy in Spanish, to go back, and to hold his tongue, and Monteiro, pressing his hat firmly on his head, having thrust a couple of pistols into his belt, and a third into the breast of his coat, rapidly descended the stairs; at the foot of them he met the landlady.

“Eh, sir! what awful errand——”

“There, there, good woman, you shall know within an hour. Look to the fire and the lights; I may bring back company.”

The night was pitch dark—a cold blast from the river swept up Salisbury Street where Monteiro’s abode was situated. His heart beat high. Although it was not yet late enough for the general audience to be leaving the theater, how could he tell but that by some jugglery Maud had been already entrapped, and before he could reach and save her what crime might not have been perpetrated! Turning into the Strand, at that hour dark and deserted, he walked quickly in the direction of Bridge Street as the line most likely to be adopted by the conspirators; and as they went he hastily explained to his companion that an attempt was to be made that evening to carry off the niece of his friend Lady Helmsford, that he was

determined to defeat it, and that he would be aided by D'Arcy.

"I fear an overpowering force, so, while D'Arcy and I hold the ruffians in check, you must conduct the lady to my lodgings, Victor, and thence we will convey her home."

He had hardly uttered the words before the sounds of horses and wheels approaching rapidly warned them that the moment of action had come, and they soon descried through the gloom a lumbering coach dragged by four horses, which were urged to their best speed by two men riding postilion ; two others were on the box, one horseman on a gray steed kept alongside the wheelers, and another rode by the carriage door on the side where Monteiro and his attendant were walking, as it was most in shadow. Directly they came abreast, the horseman by the carriage called out something in Spanish, and Monteiro instantly drew the pistol from his breast and fired into the near leader, exclaiming as he did so, "Victor ! mark the gray." Both shots at such close quarters told. The team, suddenly arrested, tumbled together over the dying horse, and with their riders became a confused struggling heap, while the two men on the box with difficulty saved themselves from a bad fall : they rapidly found their feet, and one of them went to extricate the rider of the disabled gray horse. Meantime, Monteiro rushing to the carriage heard a bullet whiz past his ear from some direction, and saw D'Arcy throw himself from his horse, and drawing his sword take his stand by Victor, who was keeping off the two men who had been on the coachbox ; all this passed with lightning-like rapidity. While Monteiro tore open the door and exclaiming, "Trust yourself to me, dear lady ! you shall be safe with your aunt before an hour is over !" held out his arms to lift the terrified inmate from the carriage.

"Who—who are you ? oh, can it be Monsieur di Monteiro ?" asked poor Maud in a tremulous whisper.

"Yes ; yes ! but there is not a moment to lose !"

"Take, oh ! take me to the Countess !" exclaimed Maud, throwing her arms round him and clinging tightly,

so tightly that, in all her terror, she could feel the strong beating of his heart.

He lifted her to the side of the road, where he still held her while he called "Victor!"

"Can you walk a little way—only a few hundred yards? I dare not stay with you! I must beat these fellows off. The man I have called will take you to a place of safety; once you are escaped they will be gone!"

"I will do as you direct," said Maud with wonderful composure, though trembling violently. Seeing she understood him, Monteiro sprang back into the fray, and Victor, crossing to where Maud stood, led her quickly to the turn into the dim street where Monteiro lodged.

"Give them a shot," growled D'Arcy, "and let us retreat. The leader is gone down the Strand. I doubt but he is hurt by his roll over, and is gone to call up the others."

All this struggle had not been conducted without much outcry and loud oaths.

"Who are you? by what right do you stop respectable travelers?" exclaimed the bigger of the two men now opposed to Monteiro and D'Arcy.

"We are Lady Helmsford's servants, and acting for her," shouted Monteiro. "Take care what you do; the lady has escaped. Why fight for an empty casket?"

As they called out thus, D'Arcy and Monteiro had gradually pressed back their antagonists past the street down which Victor had conducted Maud, and hearing a sound of approaching horses D'Arcy called out, "Here are the rest of my lady's people!" Monteiro at the same time firing another pistol at random, whereupon the smaller swordsman, who had not as yet uttered anything save strange oaths, cried, "The game's up! I am hit! Save yourself! I am not going to swing for this night's work!"

"By ——!" cried the other, "D'Arcy, you've turned traitor! I knew you would! Take that for payment!"

He aimed a desperate thrust at the Irishman, who was somewhat thrown off his guard by the short parley; but Monteiro, quick as thought, caught and partly turned it aside, receiving, as he did so, a flesh wound in the upper

part of his arm, and seeing that both their opponents were beating a rapid retreat, D'Arcy and Monteiro followed their example, and found themselves at the door of the latter's residence just as it had been closed on Maud and her escort.

When the object of all this fray beheld the entrance of a respectable-looking house, and a portly, motherly, well-dressed female standing in the light of a lamp suspended from the roof, she felt she was saved.

"Oh, stay with me!" she exclaimed, breaking from Victor, and taking good Dame Jefferson's hand in both her own, she pressed it to her. "Stay with me, good friend! do not leave me till I am restored to Lady Helmsford—to my aunt."

"Dear! dear!" cried the landlady, "what grand young lady is this? This is the company we expected! Well, indeed! My lady, I will gladly do all I can. Dear! dear! your beautiful shoes are all spoiled, and you are scarce able to stand. Come upstairs with me to the Don's room. There is a good fire, and I will mull you a cup of wine."

"Take zee best care of this noble demoiselle," said Victor in his broken English; "I return to zee combat."

He was hastening forth when he met Monteiro and D'Arcy.

But Mistress Jefferson, intent upon succoring the terrified girl given to her care, had already begun to support her upstairs, for, in truth, Maud's limbs were hardly equal to the task. A strange numbness seemed to pervade her and dull her faculties; she was too healthy, too much mistress of herself to faint, and she was too deeply agitated to shed tears. She just wanted to be quite still and silent for a few moments, so she clung, quivering in every nerve, to the stout arm of the buxom landlady, and scarce saw where she was going till she was in the chamber usually occupied by Monteiro as his principal sitting-room. Here Mistress Jefferson bustled about, removing the dainty satin shoes which had been soiled in the transit to the *present haven*, and placing Maud in a large cushioned chair by the fire, she proceeded to bring wine, which she

insisted the young lady should taste. Maud did so, thinking it strong and nasty, nevertheless, feeling wonderfully revived after she had swallowed it.

"Where am I? and who are you that are so good to me?" she asked, looking round wonderingly at the curious mixture of common furniture and costly articles of foreign workmanship.

"In the lodgings of Don Juan di Monteiro, madam, and I have the honor to be his landlady."

"And will my aunt come soon?"

"Ah! that I know not. In short, I know nothing; but if you will allow me, my lady, I will step down and inquire, and find you a dry pair of shoes, and a sacque of my daughter's, if you will deign to wear them, for this lovely muslin has been dragged through the mire."

"Oh, do not leave me!" cried Maud, stretching out her hands; "I dare not be alone!"

"Nay, madam, I must; you are quite safe. There's not an honester house in all London than mine." So saying, the landlady bustled away, and did not return for what seemed a terribly long time to Maud, who heard her voice before she entered, speaking loudly as if to some one at a distance. "Dear heart alive! I never did hear of anything half so terrible. Set supper in my own parlor; I'll be down soon. Here, madam," pushing open the door, and appearing flushed and eager, "here are my daughter's best shoes and sacque," kneeling to put on the neat black slippers which yet were scarce a fit for the feet that essayed to wear them. "And dear! dear! you are trembling still, and no wonder! but Mr. Victor is busy mulling a cup of claret. You must take it. And the Don is just having his wounds seen to, and removing the marks of the fray; and he begs then you will permit him to see you, and settle about taking you to St. James's Square. I'm sure I wonder——"

"How! is Monsieur di Monteiro wounded?" cried Maud; "I am so grieved? Not severely, I do trust? Tell him I long to see and thank him, and to know how it all happened; but above all, to go to Lady Helmsford and dear Dorothy."

"And so you shall, my lady, all in good time ; but Mr. D'Arcy tells me the Strand is swarming with ruffians on the look-out for your ladyship, so you must e'en rest till the coast is clear. There, now, I hope you feel more comfortable, and I'll see if I can't cleanse this beautiful muslin. I was a rare hand at clear-starching once."

"D'Arcy !" repeated Maud, recalling the name and Dorothy's communications. "Who is D'Arcy ?"

"Oh, a very civil-spoken gentleman, a follower of his Excellency Don Monteiro ; has fought with him somewhere abroad. It's well he was at hand to help in your ladyship's rescue." A knock at the door interrupted the flow of her eloquence. "Ah ! 'tis Mr. Victor with the mulled wine. It smells right good. Do, madam, just taste it, and this sugared biscuit, it will revive you."

"Indeed I am wonderfully recovered, and oh ! so thankful, kind dame, to be here, but I can scarce swallow anything more. However, I would not be ungracious." She put the cup to her lips. "It is indeed excellent," added Maud, setting down the cup.

"And now may I tell Don Monteiro 'hat you will see him ?"

"Yes, certainly."

The landlady put some more coal on the fire, gathered up Maud's shoes and sacque, curtsied, and departed. The few minutes that ensued were very troubled. Maud longed, yet dreaded, to see her deliverer. Here was the culmination of the indefinite sympathy, or comprehension, that always seemed to link them together ; moreover, the fact of D'Arcy being his follower seemed to point to some more tangible connection. Nor could she believe that her rescue had been the result of accident. *Who* was this stranger, who thus watched over her ?

At this stage of her reflections, Maud rose and contemplated herself in the only mirror the room could boast ; it was over a sort of console table, on which stood a small richly inlaid cabinet. The image reflected was of a very pale delicate face, the eyes looking all the darker and larger for the pallor of the cheeks ; masses of nut-brown hair a little loosened and careless, scarce disordered ; and

a slight graceful figure looking somewhat strange in a white silk petticoat, and a sacque of gay many-colored chintz. "How my aunt would laugh, and—" but the sound of the door-handle turning, made her return quickly to her seat by the fire, with a beating heart, as Don Juan di Monteiro entered and came towards her. He had completely effaced the signs of the fray, and wore a suit of violet velvet with cut steel buttons and a rich lace cravat; the left sleeve of his coat had been opened and was tied with ribbons, but he did not wear a sling; something indescribable in his eyes, in his whole bearing, thrilled through Maud with a species of fear as he approached, but she surmounted it, and rushed into words to support her courage.

"How **can** I thank you enough, Monsieur di Monteiro? you **have** saved my life." She held out her hand.

Monteiro raised it respectfully to his lips.

"Any man would do as much for the humblest woman! How much more would I not do and dare for you!" he said this in a low voice, his eyes cast down, and with a slight hesitation, very different from the calm assurance of his ordinary manner.

"And may I not return to Lady Helmsford?"

"Not immediately," returned Monteiro. "It is scarce safe, but you shall not be delayed beyond what is unavoidable. Tell me," he went on, the ease and ardor of his voice and bearing returning as he spoke, "have you recovered the terrible shock you must have received? Your **hand** still trembles!" he made a motion as if to take it again, but checked himself. "I so earnestly hoped you might have been spared this."

"Then you know more than I do. Ah! tell me everything. And your wound! how heartless of me to forget; is it very painful?"

"It is nothing," returned Monteiro, turning from her, and leaning against the mantelpiece with averted eyes.

"Ah! Monsieur di Monteiro," cried Maud, struck by the peculiar restraint of his manner, "you know something of the mystery that surrounds me; tell me all—it would be kinder, and I am braver than I seem—tell me

all, I entreat you." She held out her clasped hands to him imploringly.

Monteiro walked down the room and back. "I will," he exclaimed. "It is a grand opportunity. You shall know all. Turn your eyes, dear lady, to mine," he resumed after a moment's pause, and leaning on the back of her chair; "look well into them, and say, do they recall any event of your life?"

Maud obeyed; too absorbed by curiosity to hesitate, she gazed into the clear bold brown eyes fixed gravely and tenderly upon her. And as she gazed, she recognized why they had always seemed dimly familiar. The scene at Langdale Priory came back to her. Her cheek grew yet more deadly white, her heart seemed to stand still as she felt the moment she had hoped for, yet dreaded, had come; but Monteiro was at her feet.

"You remember!" he exclaimed, drawing the violet and silver rosette from his bosom. "Yes! beautiful beloved! I am your husband."

Maud started from her seat, and drew back overwhelmed with a flood of emotion and remembrance. This man who claimed her, she had seen him at Lady Helmsford's feet; she had been warned against him as a daring libertine. He belonged to the cruel Catholic bloody race of Spain; and, worse than all, there was a strange power in his dark loving eyes, that made her fear even herself. *Who* would deliver her out of his hands?

"Good God!" cried Monteiro, struck by the shrinking terror of her gesture; "you do not fear me? you do not shrink from me?"

He rose as he spoke, and stood looking earnestly at her.

"No!" returned Maud, striving to steady her tones, and preserve a brave front in spite of the mortal terror which crept through her veins. "No! Why should I fear a man of honor who promised when the time came to release me?" and she pressed her hand on her heart, which now beat as though it would have burst from her *bosom*.

"Ay! I promised then, now I cannot. No! I could not give you up."

"Sir," said Maud in her stateliest manner, "would it not be more becoming to us both, were we to reserve this discussion for the presence of Lady Helmsford?"

"No, dearest!" cried Monteiro, with a sort of tender familiarity infinitely alarming, but turning away restlessly to pace the room again. "No! that would indeed be throwing up the game!" He paused, and gazing earnestly at her, exclaimed, "Brave daughter of a brave race! how gallantly you strive to hide your fears! but cast them away, sweet wife. In me you have the truest *friend*, if you will have nothing else. Forget that I claimed you. I want you to collect your thoughts, and hear all I have to tell; it is important for your own future."

The relief of his calm and candid tone was so great, that poor Maud could not sustain the tension by which she had preserved her composure, the sweet soft mouth quivered; large tears, "the first of a thunder-shower," forced themselves on the long lashes, hung a moment and dropped; then she broke down utterly, and covering her face in her handkerchief she wept vehemently, her slender frame heaving with sobs.

"For God's sake, Maud," cried Monteiro, yet not attempting to approach her—"For God's sake, dry your eyes, if you would leave me the smallest self-control. I did not think you would be thus overcome; here, sit down quietly. I will place myself opposite you, and we will talk over your affairs and prospects as if there was no question of marriage between us."

He moved the large chair to the table as he spoke, and Maud, struggling for composure and relieved by the tears she had shed, removed the handkerchief from her face, and gave him a grateful smile, which did not help to steady his pulses.

"Thank you," she said. "I will then readily listen to all you have to say." She took the seat he had placed for her. And Monteiro, walking to the end of the room, unlocked the cabinet which Maud had already noticed,

and took from it some papers ; looking through and arranging them in silence for a minute or two, he then took a chair opposite his still trembling guest, and looked at her with a smile partly amused, yet infinitely tender.

"'Tis a strange position," he said. The words and look brought the color back to Maud's cheek with a quick rush.

"Your explanation ?" she asked coldly.

"You shall have it. I make no conditions of secrecy. You are too brave and sensible a woman to need them, and you will see as I proceed, how necessary silence and caution are to us. Yes, *us*, let me for this brief hour speak as if you were my wife."

Maud rested her arm on the elbow of the chair, and her brow on her hand, hiding her eyes ; but the pulse which throbbed visibly in her white slender throat, showed how deceptive was her outward quiet.

Monteiro heaved a quick sigh, and went on, "Have you ever heard of an uncle of your father's ? a grand-uncle of your own, Rupert Langley ?"

"I have," she replied. "He was thought to be dead for long."

"Yes ; are you aware that about two years before Lord Langdale's death, letters passed between them ?"

"I know my father heard of him, but what I cannot tell !"

"Then, sweet one, know that *I* am his only son ; your kinsman if nothing else, Rupert Juan di Monteiro Langley, for I also bear the name of my dear mother's father."

Maud looked up in great astonishment. "*You* my kinsman ! Why ! but let me hear to the end."

In reply Monteiro proceeded to detail rapidly and with much animation, how, after long estrangement from his native land and everything English, his father sent him about two years before to London, with a letter to John Langley, and repeated the narrative we have already *heard* him relate to Chifferil. After the death of his *father*, Monteiro returned to the Bahamas where their

chief station had been, to make arrangements for quitting a rover's life—for which his education both in France and Spain had unfitted him. This accomplished, he determined to seek Lord Langdale and warn him of John Langley's true character.

It was on his voyage to Europe the previous spring that he had been so fortunate as to rescue Sir Stephen Compton and his daughters from death and outrage at the hands of Portuguese pirates. Sir Stephen was profoundly grateful for this deliverance, and also for conveyance to England where Monteiro safely landed them. He volunteered to reconcile the young rover to the authorities, and to do him what service he could. Monteiro then proceeded to Paris, leaving his ship at Havre, but found Lord Langdale dead and Maud removed. Paris, however, was attractive, and he had no distinct plan of life or vengeance. This was the time at which he first became acquainted with Lady Helmsford.

Here Maud turned her face to him and listened with increased attention, a movement not unnoticed by the narrator.

"I had no idea at first of her relationship to you," continued Monteiro, as he must still be called. "Suddenly I was roused from an idle life of pleasure by a communication from a man who had been my father's boatswain, and who now keeps a tavern here, informing me that another old comrade of ours, D'Arcy, had scent of the pardon; that John Langley had *you* in durance at Langdale; that he was about to wed you to his son; that, in short, the pardon which I was so desirous of finding, would but aggrandize and enrich that scoundrel! I cannot describe the rage and impatience which filled me. I posted from Paris to the coast as fast as horses could take me, having dispatched a trusty messenger to my lieutenant to take my saucy schooner across, and cruise off Langholm Head and thereabouts, waiting my signal. I crossed from Calais in an open boat one desperate rough night, and reached London only to find that D'Arcy had started for France in search of *me*. However, all thought of the pardon was swallowed up in a fierce desire to upset

John Langley's plans. I found Harold was yet in town ; I contrived to meet him more than once in public places, saw he was of my own height, noticed his long fair hair, his companions and his habits. I decided my plan ; I rejoined my ship and frequently visited the village inn at Langdale, ascertained the day fixed for the wedding, disposed of the parson, and finding they had sent for another, played out the card I had in reserve, caught my bird, stripped him of his plumage, and took his place."

Monteiro spoke rapidly till he reached this climax. Maud, drawn out of her personal fears by the deep interest of his story, had turned fully towards him and listened with eyes as well as ears.

"This is indeed a strange tale," she said ; "but you have more to tell."

"Hitherto," he resumed, "I confess I was simply guided by hatred to John Langley, and keen desire to mar his plotting. I did not think of *you*—yet the question of wedding you to me had been mooted between our fathers, as I will prove to you. I counted upon the delay that must occur before the marriage could be set aside—the difficulties that might arise—the chances I should find of getting access to you, but I did not allow sufficiently for the reckless selfishness of those who held you. I hung about Langdale till I knew you had left, and then returned to London."

Monteiro paused and rose, moving to the fire-place, where he leant against the mantelpiece.

"Such were the motives that induced me to personate your bridegroom," he resumed in a suppressed tone full of feeling ; "but I did not reckon on a new ingredient which came to dominate the rest, when, after the solemn words we both uttered, you fainted and lay deathlike and helpless in my arms—a deep, intense pity and tenderness for you filled my heart ! I have loved after a fashion before ; but when I looked upon the fragile girl, thus alone, at the mercy of cruel avaricious men, on the pure beauty of the angel face just vowed to me—my own, lying in my grasp—a new feeling sprang to life within me, something *of a parent's regard* ; but Maud—my own—my wife ! a

lover's passion too! The overpowering desire to carry you away then and there was almost stronger than reason; but not even the uselessness of the attempt deterred me so much as the fear of injury or injustice to you. And so I left you, darling, that I might win you openly, or rather, win your place for you. But now that I have told you all—that I have thrown aside the mask—I feel I cannot live through the torments of the last few weeks again. I cannot let you go; do not shrink from me." Again he knelt at her feet and caught her hand in both his, covering it and her arm with eager kisses. "Stay with me, Maud," he almost whispered in deep quick accents, his breast heaving with strong emotion; "I am your husband—none can deny my right; stay with me. In truth 'tis best and safest for yourself; trust my great love to teach *you* how to love. I can keep you hidden from all, safe from persecution, from all disturbance for the short interval before the King returns, and your own is restored to you; none will dream that you are with *me*. Who can offer you the devotion I do? you are singularly alone—be mine, beloved! By all I hold most sacred, I will be your brother, till I can win your love."

These words, uttered with passionate rapidity, together with his tightening grasp of her hand, completely overset the small amount of composure which her interest in his story had enabled Maud to collect. Her head felt dizzy—a strange faint feeling not *all* pain or terror, though both preponderated, made her look round in a sort of despairing search for a way to escape. The character of Monteiro as portrayed by Lady Helmsford, stood out in her memory to warn her against too readily yielding to the conviction of his sincerity which his look and tone almost compelled her to admit.

His vehemence—her position—alone with the stranger who was undeniably her husband—all rushed upon her with a sense of wild overpowering fear, yet still her pride and courage enabled her to preserve the appearance of calmness; she strove to withdraw her hand, and forced her trembling lips to say: "In truth, sir, you alarm me."

But so shaken was her tone that Monteiro released her

hand, and then Maud, with another terrified glance round, losing her self-control, wringing her hands, cried aloud :

"Oh ! Dorothy, dear Dorothy ! Where are you, Dorothy ?" and, covering her face, drew away to the farthest side of the room.

"Good God ! do I inspire such horror ?" exclaimed Monteiro, infinitely mortified at the result of his appeal. "Dearest lady, forgive me," he went on in an altered and calmer tone ; "I am too rough, too fiery for so delicate a darling as you are ! but trust me—I will not again forget myself. Sit down once more—see—your fear has mastered me ! we will speak together quietly and reasonably, and, on my honor, if you decide on returning to Lady Helmsford's protection, I will myself conduct you there ; but believe me 'twill only increase our difficulties."

Maud, a little ashamed of her own fears, and much reassured by Monteiro's manner, returned to her seat.

"I fear I am somewhat foolish, pardon me ; I am much shaken, and pray—pray take me back to Lady Helmsford ! Do you not see it is impossible ? I could not—I dare not stay with you, a stranger. I daresay all you have told me is true ! but still, how can you care so much for one you scarce know ? It seems to me that love must be of slow growth, as a noble character gradually reveals itself, and tenderness blooms upon esteem."

"The fair dream of an unawakened heart," said Monteiro, as he turned and stood still, for he had again sought relief in restless pacing to and fro. "There is another love, sweet one ! strong and true, that leaps to instantaneous life, as a glance, a smile, a tone, at once reveals and fills a hitherto dimly felt void, and heart calls to heart, Come ! I have waited for you—let us blend our throbbings into one ! Why do you not respond to me, Maud, my Maud, for you *are* mine !"

"But—my good cousin—as you say you are, I beseech you fulfill your promise—restore me to my aunt !"

"Still unmoved," murmured Monteiro, and bending over the papers he had laid upon the table he selected one. "You will recognize your father's writing," he said, "*read this* ; it was received by mine a few weeks before

his death, his murder. Forgive me if I detain you—but there are some matters we must decide before we part—if such is your will.” He handed her a letter as he spoke.

“It is indeed my dear father’s writing,” she exclaimed, and proceeded to read it, recognizing with a sorrowful pleasure Lord Langdale’s simple and not very polished style.

After a few lines, expressive of the pleasure it would give him to see his long-lost uncle, and a description of his own broken fortunes, the letter ran thus :

“I should like to see your son, and doubt not he is a chip of the old block. I thank you for your wish to wed him to my daughter ; but I fear me his has been too rough a school to fit him for mating with so tender a plant as my Maud ! Yet am I fearful for the child’s fate—she will either be penniless and endangered by fearful ill, or wealthy and a prey to designing sharpers—let me then see your boy Rupert, ere we speak more of the alliance.”

“Alas !” exclaimed Maud, laying down the paper. “Alas, my father ! I lost all when I lost you, but,” turning with indescribably noble grace to Monteiro, “I do pray you pardon my doubts and fears, I acknowledge you as my kinsman ; I feel you are of my father’s blood, and I thank you for the great goodness you have shown me ; nay, more, I will be guided by your counsel, only, dear cousin, do not speak to me again as you did just now ; you make me tremble and my heart stand still. I do not like to be thus shaken.”

“Faith !” exclaimed Monteiro, with a frank smile that reassured his guest wonderfully, “you set me a hard task, but I will strive to obey. Well, my counsel is, if you *will* forsake me—keep all I have told a profound secret from Lady Helmsford ; stay as much in your chamber as you can ; avoid those cursed Langleys. In little more than a fortnight I shall be able to place the pardon, which gives you the ‘Heritage of Langdale,’ in the hands of the King. I have it here ; how I got it is too long to tell. The shorter the time, the greater the danger. If John Langley had an idea of my object in

seeking the King, he would use his right as guardian, remove you beyond aid, and force you to be his son's wife. God of heaven! my blood turns cold when I think—but," interrupting himself, "you will fancy I say this to frighten you—to make you take refuge with me. I see you doubt me; nevertheless, trust me so far as to be guided by my advice; let *nothing* tempt you to reveal our—our marriage to the Countess."

"But—what shall I call you, my cousin?" and Maud looked, smiling at the peculiarity of their position, across the table to where Monteiro had placed himself at a judicious distance.

"Ah! call me Rupert," he exclaimed, "sweetest cousin and wife; even so much of familiarity is delicious."

"Hush, hush!" she replied. "Then, Rupert, is it right that I deceive my aunt, who has been so good to me?"

"I do not see that she has been so wonderfully good! And I tell you, Maud, a small thing would change her. It will be fatal if she knows I am your husband." Monteiro spoke too earnestly to measure his words.

"Cousin," said Maud, looking steadily at him, "have you ever sought her in marriage?"

"Never!" he replied promptly; "never, on my word!" But though he met Maud's eyes frankly at first, the memory of certain passages of the Countess's own unmistakable feeling for himself rose up to embarrass him, and his own eyes sank under Maud's glance.

She sighed. "Well, as it will not be for long I will even obey you," she said; "but it goes against me—and Dorothy?"

"Not a syllable, as you love—no, not *me*, your own safety. She may be good, but she is imprudent; she let out to D'Arcy the fact of your having received a billet from your strange husband."

"And that was from you! How wonderful! How did you get it conveyed?"

"That I will not tell you now; but I can always write to you. This marriage of ours, too, I always strove to keep it hidden from unholy eyes. I did not mean to

confess it to you now, but your distress—the opportunity overcame me, and—I am punished.”

“I did not mean to wound you ; but how could I suddenly, without knowledge, take you for my husband ? ”

“How was it you consented to wed Harold Langley ? ”

“In truth I scarce know,” replied Maud frankly and gravely. “I was so miserable at Langdale, I would have done anything to escape. I did not feel then as I do now ; I seem to be years older, and—and—I did not care enough for Harold to be disturbed, nor did he care for me—”

“Ay ! ” cried Monteiro, “you felt that your nobility and loveliness were of no account with him, compared to the rank—the rich heritage—you would bring him ! ”

“And you, Cousin Rupert ? Has that heritage no part in coloring your estimate of me ? ”

“No, madam,” he returned, much wounded ; “nor do I deserve the taunt. There was a time, I grant, when I should have coveted so fair a portion of my country’s land ; since I knew *you* I have forgotten it. I trust you are not incapable of comprehending the unselfishness of a love which enables me to resist the maddening temptation to insist on my right to the companionship of my wife.”

“I did not intend to hurt you,” said Maud penitently ; “perhaps now that you have told me all—”

“I will at once see that you are restored to your aunt,” interrupted Monteiro ; replacing the letter of Lord Langdale in the cabinet, and carefully locking it he left the room.

“You are not angry, Monsieur di Monteiro ? ” asked Maud faintly as he went out ; but he did not hear her.

Overcome by a variety of emotions, Maud rested her head upon the table and wept quietly—almost refreshingly. She wished she had not uttered those words of doubt ; she saw that Rupert, or Monteiro was of a different caliber from the other men she had met, but still the thought of his curious intimacy with her aunt rose up to

hold her back from unreserved confidence in him. Time only could solve that and other things.

But Monteiro soon returned. "I have been consulting with D'Arcy," he said. "I fear the Strand is scarce safe for you yet. The best plan will be, I think, to go myself to St. James's Square to let Lady Helmsford know of your safety, and send her carriage and servants and your own Dorothy to fetch you in safety." He paused. "Let me again impress on you the necessity of keeping this conversation secret. Adieu, madam!—Trust me. If you are resolved to misunderstand and reject me, I will not intrude myself upon you ; for the present we must meet as strangers."

He bowed low and was gone before Maud could frame a reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY HELMSFORD had a true tyrant nature of the better sort. Given her own special fancies and desires, she could be generous ; and, though hard and resolute when crossed or disappointed, was capable of warm-hearted impulses which might deceive ordinary judges of character.

She would willingly enough scatter benefits, but in the spirit of casting crumbs to the dogs beneath her table. To recognize the *right* of common humanity to consideration and sympathy, was quite beyond the bounds of her comprehension ; nor could it enter into her heart to conceive a just beneficence, that elevates rather than oppresses the recipient.

The outrage which had just been committed roused her better feelings. She pictured to herself the terror and helplessness of her niece, with the indignation and longing to rescue her natural to the chivalry inseparable from a brave, bold disposition. She thrilled with fury at the *idea of any one* daring to meddle with a young lady under *her* protection. Could she have transported herself to

Maud's side, she would for the moment have defended her at the risk of her own life ; and as she stood like a lioness robbed of her cubs in the lobby of the theater, her eyes flashing, her voice vibrating with the anger and anxiety that were raging in her soul, all those who knew her, and all those who did not also, exclaimed in one form or another, how touching it was to see Lady Helmsford's deep attachment to her niece.

Owing to information given by some of those who had been loitering about the door, the first attempt at pursuit was made up Drury Lane in a northerly direction ; and, no traces being found, Lady Helmsford, after profuse promises of reward and punishment, was fain to return home. Her ever-recurring question was, "What has become of Sparrow ? These vile wretches who have taken my niece have not surely carried off Sparrow also !" The third or fourth repetition of the formula was answered by the appearance of the missing *dame de campagnie*, led by, or rather in the custody of, an official of the theater, and in sad plight ; her rouged cheeks water-worn into small ravines by the tears which had plentifully coursed down them, her dress crumpled and soiled as if she had been kneeling on it in some damp place.

"Sparrow ! what is the meaning of this ? Where did you find her ?" to her custodian.

"I heard sore crying and lamentation, please your ladyship, in a small apartment behind the pay-office, where the pay-clerk keeps his cloak, umbrella and such like. We found the door locked and burst it open, and this lady was within."

"Speak, Sparrow ! Do stop crying, you are safe with me !"

"Oh ! my dear lady, I thought I was to be murdered ! Have you been indisposed ? that new man, Thomas, came, some time after you went to the Princess, with a message from your ladyship that you were ill, but not to frighten Mistress Langley ; so I just said you had sent for me, and followed Thomas. He led me through many passages, and down stairs, and threw open the door of a room. I went in, he closed the door, and when,

finding no one there, I tried to open it, it was locked, and ever since have I been in durance."

This was told with many sobs and exclamations.

"It is a deep-laid plot!" cried Lady Helmsford. "Send for some of my people—call that man Thomas!"

But Thomas was nowhere to be found! and as no further tidings seemed forthcoming, and leaving the search in the hands of Lord Chedworth, who had chanced to come into the theater when Maud's disappearance had been first discovered, Lady Helmsford reluctantly left the theater, and returned to her residence, severely cross-examining Mrs. Sparrow on their homeward route. "How came you to be so negligent as to quit Mistress Maud?" she asked angrily, reckless of the poor woman's sufferings and excellent excuse, till Mistress Letitia felt she would almost prefer precipitating herself under her ladyship's chariot wheels, to enduring this long-drawn torture.

Arrived at St. James's Square, the Countess dispatched a messenger to Mr. Secretary Langley, to acquaint him of his ward's disappearance, and ordered lights *and* Chifferil into the large dining-room on the ground-floor.

"Why, Chifferil, you look as if you had lost your own daughter!" cried the Countess, as she noticed the troubled aspect of her factotum. "'Tis a frightful catastrophe! No doubt this vagabond husband, whom she expected, poor child, to turn out a *rara avis*, has carried her off, and we have no trace. God only knows what horrors may ensue. Where is that old-fashioned attendant of hers? yet stay, she will torment me with her noisy grief. Tell me, Chifferil, what think you? Is Mistress Langley a willing captive?"

"Oh no, madam," cried Chifferil eagerly; and then, stopping himself, resumed: "It is a bold assertion for one who knows so little of young ladies as myself, yet I feel certain this has been a cunningly-devised scheme to entrap her."

"I think so too," returned Lady Helmsford, who proceeded to recount her version of the event; but before she had quite concluded, Dorothy rushed in, wild with *terror and distress*.

"Oh ! madam !" she cried, "where is my beautiful child ? Is this the care you take of your sister's daughter ? If I had been by her, I would have torn the flesh off their bones before they should have laid a finger on her. I'll go forth and find her !" and she began to put on the cloak and hood she had brought on her arm.

"But where will you find her, my good woman ?" asked the Countess, with unusual forbearance. "Do you think I will leave anything undone to save my niece ? Were she a princess no more diligent search could be made for her ; rest where you are."

"Rest !" repeated Dorothy, sinking on a seat, covering her face with her hands, and rocking herself to and fro. "How can I rest, when she may be calling for me this minnit, and I can't go to her ? Oh ! my darlin', my darlin', God guard you, the blessed Virgin and all the saints watch over you !" For Dorothy had the advantage of having been affiliated to two systems, and in an hour such as this, naturally availed herself of the resources of both. "Ah ! my lady, mark my words, it is all that villain Langley's doings. Oh, what'll become of me ! Where is she gone at all ? Nine o'clock past ! I shall go mad."

"Don Juan di Monteiro," announced the unhappy butler, who knew what a reckoning awaited him, for engaging a stranger in place of the invalided Truscott.

Monteiro came in quickly ; he looked pale and grave, and his left arm was in a sling. Going straight to the Countess he exclaimed : "Be comforted, dear lady ! your niece is safe, and only waits your carriage and servants to be restored to you."

"Twas an angel spoke," cried Dorothy, seizing his hand and kissing it in the rapture of relief. "Safe, do you say ! Oh ! where, noble gentleman ? let me go to her."

"Perfectly safe," replied Monteiro, smiling kindly.

"Leave us—leave us, all of you !" cried the Countess authoritatively. "Go, Dorothy ! How dare you attempt to wait !"

"Now, Monteiro—Juan ! tell me all ! Is the poor

child indeed safe and uninjured? I have suffered agonies!" Tears of excitement stood in Lady Helmsford's eyes; never before had she seemed so lovely to Monteiro, as he noticed these marks of what he thought affection for Maud.

"Fair Countess," he exclaimed as he took and kissed her hand, "this tenderness becomes you well. I have been so fortunate as to arrest the ruffians in their base design." He went on to recount, that an old soldier who had formerly served with him, and who was in search of employment, had been engaged to assist in carrying off a lady, he understood with her own consent. Finding the lady was a niece of Lady Helmsford's, and, from the precautions used, beginning to doubt if she was a consenting party, he at the last moment managed to inform Monteiro, who recapitulated the events of the rescue.

"And Maud?" asked Lady Helmsford, much surprised by this tale.

"Is safe at my lodgings, under the care of my landlady—a kindly respectable woman. Having had this slight hurt attended to, and made myself fit to appear, I ascertained that Mistress Langley was recovering from the shock she had received, and came on to relieve your fears."

"You left her to relieve my fears?" said Lady Helmsford slowly and thoughtfully, looking earnestly at Monteiro.

"Yes. I should have brought her to you at once, *ma Belle*; but, from D'Arcy's account, I feared the larger half of the marauding party might still be in the Strand, and possibly attack us. I therefore thought it wiser to come on at once, that you should send your carriage and servants for the young lady. Bold as these ruffians are, they will not venture to attack your people!"

"I will order it forthwith, and Dorothy shall go to bear her company. Ah, Juan! I can scarce say how deep my gratitude is; I have been so miserable about this fair child! It was indeed a gallant rescue; and you *have been hurt!*" She took his hand tenderly in both *her own*. "Do you suffer? You have done me the

noblest service—name your reward !” These words were almost whispered, as she softly pressed his hand.

“Reward !” cried Monteiro gaily, “as if service to you and sweet Mistress Langley were not its own reward ! But shall you not direct the carriage to be prepared ? Maud was eager to be restored to you, and no doubt feels ill at ease in my poor lodgings.”

“Maud !” repeated Lady Helmsford, struck by his familiar mention of her name. “Maud !”

“A thousand pardons !” he exclaimed, endeavoring to cover the slip he had made. “You so often use her name, that in the eagerness of the moment it came naturally to my lips.”

“True,” returned the Countess reflectively ; and turning from him touched the bell.

The butler instantly appeared. “The carriage immediately ! let four or five of the men go with it—see that they have their staffs ! and tell Mistress Langley’s woman to be ready when it comes round.”

“It is already at the door, my lady ; and a messenger from my Lord Chedworth has brought this”—handing a note to his mistress. She hastily tore it open. “He says they have tracked the carriage half way down the Strand, found a dead horse in the road, and gathered from the people living there that a fray had taken place ; but that after a while the carriage had moved on. All’s well that ends well—thanks to you, Monteiro. I will send a line in reply.”

“And Mr. Langley, madam, has gone out to dine—his servants know not where.”

“Better so, perhaps ! I do not want that solemn prig to-night.”

“Why send for him then ?” said Monteiro carelessly.

“Do you not see, dear Monteiro, I must ! he is her guardian.”

“True—the carriage and Mistress Dorothy are ready ?”

“Yes, sir—my lord.” The grave butler was not quite sure of the foreign gentleman’s status.

"Then, dear Lady Helmsford, *au revoir*. We will delay as little as possible."

"What!" cried the Countess in painful surprise, "you are not going with them?"

"Of a surety yes! I could not think of trusting your niece to the escort of servants merely. Were any attempt made to stop them, they would want some leader; and besides, for mere courtesy, I could not allow the young lady to—"

"She does not need you, Juan," said Lady Helmsford earnestly. "She will scarce know if you are there or not."

"That I dare say," he replied, with a slight tinge of bitterness in his tone. "Nevertheless, it is but right I should see her safe from my abode to your care—and I will do so. *Au revoir*, Lady Helmsford"—he bowed and turned resolutely away.

The Countess stood a moment in thought, then went hastily out into the hall, in time to see Monteiro hand Dorothy into the carriage with much politeness.

She returned to the dining-room and penned a short note to Lord Chedworth, telling him the lost lamb was found; and then sat in deep thought waiting the arrival of Maud—deep, but not altogether pleasant. The tone in which Monteiro had uttered the words, "This tenderness becomes you well," dwelt in her ear. It had filled her with delight, it had sounded like the renewal of bright hopes, for the Countess did not deceive herself of her own feeling. She well knew how intensely and passionately she loved this man who treated her with a kindness and courtesy maddening in their friendly coldness. It was foolish, this determination of his to attend personally Maud's transit from his lodgings; but by no means extraordinary—nothing she could cavil at—nevertheless, she did not like it; and, strive to banish it as she would, that and his familiar mention of Maud's name would recur to her. "He has scarce seen or spoken to her," thought the haughty Countess. "And though she is a graceful girl, she has not *my* beauty; she is cold and colorless, while I——" She rose, surveyed herself in the *glass*, and then rang for Beville to attend her in her dress-

ing-room, whither she retired to repair damages and prepare for action by the time the convoy returned.

"What has become of Sparrow?" she asked.

"Oh! indeed, my lady, she is more dead than alive—she is gone to bed, and the housekeeper has made her a posset."

"She is a foolish creature! I wonder I am troubled with her! Had you been in charge of Mistress Langley you would not have let her slip."

"Your ladyship is very good."

The time seemed very long till the return of Monteiro and Dorothy with their charge, but they came at last.

The Countess went out into the hall to receive them, and when Maud, clinging to her good nurse and followed by Monteiro, crossed the threshold, Lady Helmsford, with an impulse very unusual to her, and springing from very complex sources, held out her arms to the pallid, trembling girl whose emotion at being thus received was not unmixed with pain. Maud threw herself into the offered embrace, clinging fondly to her aunt, and as they stood thus under the light of the hall lamp, Monteiro met Lady Helmsford's eyes with a glance so soft and tender that the thought thrilled through her, "He must love me; and some motive unknown to me holds him back."

"Oh! thank God! I am with you again," whispered Maud; "I will never leave your sight again!"

"Really, my sweet niece," cried the Countess, with a bright but kindly smile, "your custody is almost as onerous a charge as the guardianship of Castle Dangerous. All the world seems bent on winning you!"

"Or my possible inheritance, dear madam," said Maud wearily.

"Come, you must sorely need refreshment," returned the Countess, motioning as if to lead her to the dining-room.

"No, no indeed, dear aunt, only rest!" She ventured to lean her head against Lady Helmsford's shoulder as she spoke. "The kind landlady at—at—Monsieur di Monteiro's lodgings supplied all my wants."

It was well Maud had instinctively hidden her face, for

at the effort to speak Monteiro's name, her cheeks reddened painfully.

"Let me then go to my room with Dorothy. I have caused you enough disturbance, dear aunt; I only want rest;" these words were spoken falteringly.

"Well, I believe it is kindest to let you retire; here, Dorothy, see to your mistress. Beville!"—for the upper servants had crowded into the hall to witness the return of the young lady whose disappearance had dismayed them.—"Beville! go—offer what assistance you can."

"And where—oh! where is poor Mistress Sparrow?" cried Maud, suddenly remembering her and looking round.

"Oh, Sparrow!" said Lady Helmsford, laughing, "she is in sorry case! the wretches entrapped her into some den and locked her up! Judging from her plight I imagine she spent the time of her imprisonment crawling about on her knees imploring the unseen powers for aid. You owe her a new silk dress, Maud, if you ever get your own. She too has retired to rest."

"Then I will wish you good-night," returned Maud, making a strong effort to be composed, and moving away from Lady Helmsford she looked round the persons assembled, avoiding Monteiro's glance. A sort of congratulatory murmur rose from them. Maud, with a surprisingly grand, yet natural air, smiled and said, "I thank you, good people, for your friendly interest."

"We have all offered hearty prayers for your restoration," returned Chifferil, stepping forward as spokesman of the household.

Maud curtsied slightly, then turning to Monteiro, with downcast eyes and delicate graceful hesitation, held out one hand while she rested the other on Dorothy's arm.

"I pray you, sir," she said, soft and low, "believe ever in my deep gratitude."

Monteiro bent his knee as to a sovereign, and lightly touched her fingers with his lips, but he did not utter a word. Then offering her brow to her aunt's kiss, Maud, still leaning on Dorothy's arm, slowly ascended the staircase, Monteiro standing where he was when she turned

away, following her receding figure with his eyes, forgetful for the moment of everything else, and Lady Helmsford absorbed in watching *him*. He first recalled himself. "Come!" he exclaimed, offering her his hand; "come, dear Countess, you must need rest and refreshment as much as any one;" and he led her into the dining-room, where Lady Helmsford, more disturbed than she cared to acknowledge to herself by the irresistible attraction Maud's vanishing form seemed to have for Monteiro's eyes, threw herself into a large arm-chair by the fire, determined to ascertain if possible his feelings. Dissimulation was peculiarly irksome to her bold proud nature, but there were no means too low, too tortuous, for the desperate game she was resolved to play.

"She is a fair child and a noble!" exclaimed the Countess in an easy tone, as though no other thought was in her heart, to Monteiro, who was thinking how he could best and soonest get away. "Marked you the air with which she spoke to the servants?"

"She is worthy to be your niece," said Monteiro, with a complimentary smile.

"Nay, sir, she has a beauty all her own," replied Lady Helmsford, shaking her fan playfully at him. "Do you think I cannot see and acknowledge merit in others?"

"You can well afford to be generous! But, fair Countess, I must wish you good-night."

"What, so soon! Will you not sup with me? Why, you must be exhausted, what with journeying to and fro, and beating off—how many?"

"Twelve men in buckram," returned Monteiro, laughing. "Indeed, I must resist such temptation! Moreover, though 'tis scarce worth mentioning, my arm is somewhat stiff; now my valet is a good surgeon, and the sooner he sees to it the better; therefore—"

"Ah! why return then, dear Juan?" cried Lady Helmsford, eagerly seizing the chance thus offered. "Rest *here*; you shall have all care in my house; I will send for Doctor R——, and I will nurse you myself!"

"Am I not the highest living example of virtue," exclaimed Monteiro, "to resist such a temptation? With

you for a nurse I should be invalided for life ; I should never have strength of mind to resign your care. No, no, gracious lady ! ”

“ Wherefore *resist* or *resign*, Juan ? ” returned the Countess, looking down upon her fan. “ Do you think I fear slanderous tongues too much to follow the impulse of my heart ? Moreover, there is ever the means of stopping them. ”

“ I should be unworthy the name of man were I to permit you to forget yourself for me, ” cried Monteiro, with an air of devotion. “ Suffer me to see you to-morrow, dear lady ; I must confer with my good friend D’Arcy to-night, and I fear he will be gone ere I can return. ”

“ To-morrow then, Juan, ” murmured the Countess, the light fading from her eyes. “ And this D’Arcy—I should like to see and reward him myself—he seems a brave man and true. ”

“ He is—he is ; but somewhat rough for your presence, madam ! ”

“ We must not be too fine to handle the tools where-with we work, ” replied Lady Helmsford, more to herself than her companion. “ To-morrow then, Juan, ” she spoke it somewhat sadly, for his will always dominated hers, which was probably the secret of his fascination ; “ and send D’Arcy to me soon—any day before noon. ”

“ Good-night then, *belle dame*, ” said Monteiro, taking her hand and putting it to his lips. “ Ah ! could that fair girl’s mother look down upon her from a brighter world, how she would bless the tender sister’s care that shelters her child ! ”—a piece of sentiment which Monteiro intended should score to Maud’s advantage, but which produced an exactly contrary effect.

“ My sister, ” muttered Lady Helmsford, looking after him as he closed the door. “ His mention of her is a warning. ”

Above in the peaceful seclusion of her own chamber *Maud*, freed from all restraints, enjoyed the relief of a *flood of tears* in Dorothy’s arms.

"Oh! dear, dear old friend, when shall we have quiet and safety?"

"In God's good time," returned Dorothy piously. "Now get to your bed, mavourneen; I'll not ask you a word till you have rested, and your hands have lost the *thrimble*."

Maud gratefully accepted the truce, and closed her eyes—long before she slept. In the stillness, Monteiro's voice seemed still to sound in her ear, and the warmth and tenderness of his tones to haunt her heart—"My own! my wife!" It was strangely terrifying to be thus appropriated, and he was utterly different from the ideal she had formed of her unknown husband! Yet Monteiro had shown great delicacy and consideration for her; but for that terrible doubt of his sincerity, suggested by his relations with her aunt, he might have been satisfied with the result of her meditations—this doubt, however, was fatal.

And Dorothy, too, had her uneasy thoughts while she watched by her young lady's couch long after she seemed to be asleep.

"It's mighty quare altogether," she reflected. "That Mr. Monteiro is a real fine man, and an elegant gentleman, but I'm just the laste taste afraid of him; there is the divil's own fire in his eyes sometimes. It was mighty dark as we came along, but I am pretty sure I saw him take her hand in both his own and hould it to his heart! Ah! they are all the same, thieves of the world they are! Anyway he was wonderful polite to me; a tongue that would wheedle the birds off trees ye have, Mr. Monteiro, or whoever you are! Well, well, only leave my bird alone, and work what mischief ye like elsewhere. But if my lady gets a glint of your love-making to my child, what will become of us at all, at all! Ah! isn't she ready to ate him? God preserve us!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE absence of John Langley on the eventful night described in the last chapter, was part of the plot. He was of course aware that the Countess would immediately send for him, and thought it as well to be out of the way.

It was late (at least for him) before he returned, and great was his dismay to find a note from his hopeful son awaiting him.

"The grand scheme is blown to the winds. Come to me to-morrow ; I have a broken arm and a skinful of sore bones." So ran the epistle, and Langley was obliged to devour his impatience, or let it devour him, as best he might till morning. The news, too, that Lady Helmsford had sent, seeking him, showed that some attempt on Maud had been made, as her ladyship would certainly not have sought him without some strong necessity.

When, however, the whole tale was revealed, his rage was only one part of his disturbance. A sudden conviction pressed upon him, that some dexterous friend to Maud and enemy to himself watched over her.

"I tell you, sir," cried Harold, "that cursed Spaniard has something to do with it. The fellow who fired the first shot was just his height, and that treacherous dog whom Strange or Morley, whichever he be, put such faith in, called out in some queer lingo just before the shots were fired. Moreover, I have seen the dog somewhere before."

"But how came it that you, who were—let me see—six with the postilions, were overcome by three? at least, I cannot make out that you had more than three assailants."

"Why, there might have been more, the whole affair was so short ; we were going as fast as the infernal road would let us, when crack ! crack ! down went the leader *and the rest* on top of him. My good gray tumbled on

his head, and I fell with my right arm doubled under me; I managed though to pull the trigger of my pistol—mine was the only one among us (it was a mistake not to have more firearms)—and aimed as well as I could with the left hand at the fellow who was making to the carriage door. Then, knowing that my wrist was useless, I went as fast as I could to find those rascals who should have joined us before. They were ever so far down the Strand, and by the time we returned the game was up, the bird flown, and not a trace of the rescuers to be found."

John Langley sat in silent thought.

"'Tis passing strange," he said at length. "I think, Harold, had I been in your place, I should have made a better fight."

"God's blood, sir! I am not a conjuror! the thing lies in a nutshell, our secret was not kept, some one betrayed us to a man of no common daring and resource, and *that* some one was the silent rusty fellow Strange called the 'Blazer.' He is nowhere to be found. I met the other two in full flight, one was winged—they have dispersed."

"Ay," returned Langley, writhing in his chair; "but I warrant they'll apply for their guerdon. However, they were to have but half pay if they failed—but this is all beside the matter. 'Tis the first serious check I have had for twenty years! Lord Langdale gone—Rupert out of the way—nothing but this insignificant girl left, and she the very stepping-stone by which to reach the goal of my ambition, yet she becomes an insurmountable barrier. Insurmountable! nay, that is a cowardly word. I'll *never* give up my grasp on Langdale—it shall be yours yet, my boy."

"Zounds, sir! if you could get it for me, free and unencumbered by Mistress Maud, I would say thank you; but I begin to weary of so difficult and dangerous a suit."

"Ay, Harold! but once *yours*, what a wealth of vengeance you could exact! The power which a husband holds by law, judiciously and legally used, may make any woman's life a burden to her."

"Perhaps so, sir! but I would rather spend my own in a more cheerful and agreeable manner than in plaguing myself in order to torture my wife, though I confess I should like to pay off some of the long reckoning I owe Mistress Langley."

"You have no fixity of purpose," returned the elder man; "this failure only makes *me* more resolute in the pursuit of mine. But we must never risk such another attempt as this; it is but one more proof of the weakness of force compared to craft. I must see and settle with these ruffians. You are certain none could recognize you—you were masked?"

"Yes, and never spoke, save to Strange. None of the party could know me again."

"Well, so far! the fellow shall not know me either, for it would be worse for me to be suspected than you. Harold, this escapade will cost me a hideous sum!"

"You cannot say it was my invention, sir."

"I do not, Harold: now for our future proceedings. You had better be laid up with fever from overwrought feelings and love for your charming betrothed. I will ply Lord Sunderland with prayers for the reversal of the attainder, and will even consent to sell him most of my precious South Sea stock (of which I shall not be sorry to be rid); he shall be well primed by the time the King returns. Meantime this outrage is a good excuse for insisting that my ward be restored to my custody. If I love her not 'tis her own fault; had she yielded to my wishes all would have been well for her and us, but her insolent opposition and defiance, although she must feel herself a beggarly dependant, the—the rebel pride—the indomitable will I can neither sooth nor crush, has roused a spirit in me which shall cost her dear. Why, her father was wax in my hands compared to this chit!"

"What she can see to dislike in *me*, I cannot imagine," said Harold, with candor; "perhaps she was taken up with some low fellow in France."

"I neither know nor care," returned his father; "but I can stay no longer here. My first task is to clear the wreck of our enterprise, and get rid of those fellows; I

imagine the boasting of Strange, or rather Morley, has fixed the credit of it pretty firmly on himself. Then I must see her Majesty of Helmsford, and claim my ward. You must keep out of sight, Harold, until your arm is restored ; be sure you do not solace your idle hours with dice or cards. I have reached the limits of my patience."

So saying, Master Langley with a cloudy brow left his son and took coach to Hatton Garden.

It was past mid-day, and Lady Helmsford, having finished her matutinal chocolate and received a report of Mistress Maud Langley's condition from Dorothy, sent for her *dame de compagnie*, who was unusually slow in obeying the summons, for the poor soul had lingered long in bed to rest and compose herself.

When at last she appeared in a terribly nervous condition, expecting a repetition of the cross-examination and torture of the previous night, she was greatly relieved, indeed almost melted to tears, by being graciously received.

"Come hither, Sparrow," cried her mistress ; "have you recovered your senses yet ? On my word, I think we all lost them last night ! I see now that Hobson was the real source of all the mischief. How he dared to engage a stranger without due inquiry in Truscott's place, I cannot think ; that stupid little Chifferil has been telling me he warned Hobson against him."

"And so he did, my lady ; I remember his saying he did, one evening he and Mistress Dorothy took tea with me."

"Then he should have told me, when he knew the danger that threatened my niece ; however, Hobson is dismissed."

"And I hope that sweet Mistress Langley has recovered her sore trial and is more composed."

"She is well enough," said Lady Helmsford carelessly ; "I mean, that strange woman of hers says she is very ill at ease, vaporish, and unwell—'tis not to be wondered at ; but, Sparrow, you are a well-meaning soul, and I know a friend to my niece."

The Countess smiled with such unusual condescension that Mistress Letitia was almost awed, nevertheless much flattered.

"I am sure, my lady, besides her being your niece, I feel disposed to love the young lady for her own sake."

"No doubt she is a fair child, and it is my duty to guard her carefully. Tell me, Sparrow, that day when Don Juan di Monteiro met you on the Mall, did you observe anything of a mutual understanding—anything—" interrupting herself, "you know enough of our Spanish friend to be aware that he is not over-scrupulous where pleasure or adventure is to be found."

Mistress Letitia knew no such thing, but she was quite ready to take it for granted, so she shook her head with a shocked expression of countenance.

"Such an one should not be allowed access heedlessly to a young girl's ear," continued her mistress. "Not that Monteiro is any worse than others, but he is not a suitable husband for Maud; her guardian would accuse me of negligence, in short. Speak!" cried the Countess, with sudden vehemence, no longer able to endure the task of dissimulation; "tell me every syllable that passed."

"Indeed, my lady, it is but little I can tell; they spoke chiefly in French," said Letitia, with the haste of fear.

"French!" repeated the Countess, turning uneasily in her luxurious bed, for there she received her household frequently when indisposed, *i. e.*, lazy or thoughtful. "Infamous! tell me, who spoke most?"

"Oh, Mistress Langley by far the most, with smiles and gestures, as though relating some tale."

"Indeed, and Monteiro—how looked he?"

"Mostly on the ground, and said little, till I said as it was not good manners to speak a tongue I had nearly forgotten; then we all spoke English, and Monsieur di Monteiro told us wondrous tales of foreign lands."

"Then, Sparrow," said the Countess, after a moment's thought, "would it not be well to warn Mistress Langley of this man's character? I do not mean an open coarse *warning*, but during friendly conversation you might drop *hints* respecting it."

"But, dear madam, in truth I know nothing beyond the most uncertain reports about the gentleman ; that he loved pleasure and—"

"What !" cried the Countess, raising herself on her elbow, "do you mean to say you never heard of his duel with M. de Martigny on account of that pretty foolish Marquise de Boisville? or the story of the nun taken from a convent somewhere near Brest and carried on board his ship?"

"Oh! dear me! how shocking! Is this all true?"

"Nay, that I will not answer for! 'twas so reported, and there is always some foundation for reports. I merely suggest the mention of such matters in casual conversation, just as a warning; you might also add that I hesitated to accept his offers, fearful that he was scarce steady enough to trust."

"You! you, my lady!" stammered poor Letitia, utterly overwhelmed by this mark of confidence.

"Yes; you knew he was my suitor, I suppose?"

"No doubt he was ever your ladyship's suitor; but marriage—"

"Curb your evil imagination," said Lady Helmsford carelessly. "It is true I hesitate respecting him, but he is noble and suitable, still I hesitate. Come, Sparrow, you are not without tact; exercise it to save Mistress Maud some useless pangs; but, on your life, do not quote me as your authority! Sparrow, you understand me?"

"Certainly! I—I understand; shall I see Mistress Langley to-day?"

"To-morrow may do as well; be guided by circumstances. And, Sparrow, send for Madame Hortense; order yourself a new silk dress—my only limit is that it must be gray or black. Now give me my writing-materials, ring for Beville, and go. I hope Mab and Tab have been properly attended to in all this confusion; I will see the little brutes when I am dressed."

Having obeyed these diverse orders, Mistress Sparrow curtsied and went out unnoticed; looking timidly round her she stole quickly to her own room, and there indulged

in that curious luxury, as it is undoubtedly considered by persons of her peculiar temperament—a good cry.

Lady Helmsford's confidence had greatly astonished her : moreover, in spite of her humble sincere admiration for the potentate she served, she instinctively understood her in some of her aspects, and could not find that she in her heart believed the great lady's assertion that Monteiro was a suitor for her hand. She had a sincere liking for the handsome Spaniard, who showed her a degree of kindly courtesy she did not always experience, and though she had a sort of admiring credulity for the tales that had been whispered of him, she did not think him really "bad." In spite of her reassuring answers to Lady Helmsford, she had noticed the eagerness with which Monteiro at times, when off his guard, hung on Maud's looks and words ; and she had refreshed her own poor heart, where the withered rose-leaves of youth had still some fragrance, preserved as they were by the spices of genuine kindness, good faith, and simplicity (as the sweet petals of bygone summers are kept in *pot-pourri*, which one associates with the delicate housekeeping of tender women, whom experience cannot harden)—she had, we say, refreshed her heart with a little romance, of which Maud and Monteiro were the hero and heroine, and that very morning she had, in her own mind, brought it to a climax, with the help of the gallant rescue of the night before. Now, here was that terrible eagle of a Countess swooping down on the dovecot she had nearly arranged to her mind. That Lady Helmsford would be a sad obstacle to the course of true love she always felt, but she never anticipated her stepping thus openly down into the arena. The result of poor Letitia's tears and cogitations was a very muddled condition of mind. First, and above all, she would avoid all private conversation with Mistress Maud ; but then it would be right to warn her that for her own sake she must not have anything to do with the Cavalier, who had so fascinated the Countess ; yet, in so doing, she would not slander that pleasant bright-eyed Monteiro ; though, after all, perhaps, to act on Lady Helmsford's hint would be the best and kindest

line to adopt towards the inexperienced girl, who might break her heart if she was left too long in ignorance of the projected alliance between her aunt and her deliverer ; for, after all, the grand beauty of the Countess, backed by her rank and wealth, might well outweigh Maud's girlish grace and doubtful heritage, and Lady Helmsford's words might prove to be true in the end.

"Well, well—I am sure I do not know what's best to be done," was the only approach to a conclusion she could come to ; and hoping to conciliate and benefit every one by this limpness of intention, she went away to attend to the wants of Mab and Tab.

Before Lady Helmsford's first toilet was quite accomplished, "Mr. John Langley" was announced.

"That man has a trick of ever catching me at the glass, Beville," said the Countess. "I will e'en see him in *deshabille*—it will look more troubled ! He is such an unsociable owl that I doubt if he has heard of last night's misadventure, though no doubt my messenger gossiped to his servants."

"Mr. Chifferil gave strict orders that he should say nought beyond the words he was to deliver, my lady."

"Does any one mind Chifferil, think you ? Give me that coral *négligé*, I may as well wear it ; and, Beville, should Don Monteiro call, let him be shown into my boudoir ; I do not want him to meet Langley."

Wrapped in a loose bedgown, as it was called, of blue cashmere edged with fur, her hair carelessly rolled up under a Mechlin lace cap, Lady Helmsford made her appearance with much less of ceremony than she had assumed in her first interview with John Langley, whom she found waiting in the library. She was struck by his worn, haggard aspect, and anxious to ascertain if he knew of the attempt which had been made to carry off his ward. Langley was the first to open fire.

"I have to apologize for not obeying your ladyship's summons earlier, but I was obliged to visit my son, who is severely indisposed, even before presenting myself here."

"Indeed, I regret to hear it, sir," cried the Countess,

looking sharply at him ; then, not seeing any trace of the knowledge she sought, she dashed into the admission which she detested—that an attempt had been made to molest her niece while under the sacred ægis of her protection. “What, Master Langley, is it possible that you have not heard of the attack upon your ward last night ! We have all been at our wit’s end with fright ; but, thank Heaven, she is restored, and safely lodged in her chamber above.”

“Attack, madam ! Restored ! I do not follow you.” John Langley looked at her with stern displeasure, which might or might not be surprise.

“I must recount the affair,” replied Lady Helmsford, motioning him to be seated ; and placing herself opposite, she related the events of the previous night—so far as she knew them.

Langley listened with an air of grave condemnation that, let her choose her phrases how she would, made the Countess feel as though she were confessing failure and pleading excuse. When she had finished her tale, she sat looking at Langley with a smile intended to convey her indifference to his opinion. He kept silence for some time, and then, in tones more than usually harsh, observed :

“This is a grave matter, and, I confess, disturbs me much. I did indeed hope that my young ward would be well cared for with your ladyship ; you must pardon me if I say the misadventure would not have occurred had she been in my custody.”

“I cannot see that I was in any way to blame, my good sir. The plot was deep laid ; and you see, had she been taken from *you*, she would not have been so ready to return, which would have been no small additional difficulty.”

“Granted, madam ; although it is not safe to count on the whims of so young a dame. May I ask the name of the gallant who bestowed so great a service upon us ?”

“A distinguished foreigner—Don Juan di Monteiro—well known to me.”

“I should like personally to present my acknowledg-

ments to him," said John Langley slowly ; "and, I confess also, to judge the qualities of a man likely to prove a rival to my son."

"How do you mean?" asked the Countess, a scornful smile curling her lip.

"What a lady of your experience must well understand," he replied. "A young lady will be sure to be fascinated by the brave man who rescued her from outrage."

"Oh, make your mind easy on that score," exclaimed Lady Helmsford carelessly, though with rage in her soul : but Langley went on as if he had not heard her :

"Would that my poor boy had been at hand to play the deliverer's part, instead of being stretched on the fevered couch to which Mistress Maud's whims and your ladyship's double-dealing have driven him" (these last words with much bitterness).

"How *dare* you speak thus to me!" cried the Countess, starting back resentfully, as if from a blow, at these insulting words—to her, who scarce ever heard anything save adulation and compliments. "Explain yourself, or never show your face to me again."

"*That* I would undertake readily enough," said Langley, who was now resolved to brave this haughty woman, and assert his legal rights, unless she yielded somewhat to him ; "nor do I hesitate to say that while you have kept your word in the letter, you have broken it in spirit. You permit my son to see his affianced wife, 'tis true, but only amid a crowd, where men of all grades have equal if not freer access to her than himself, you—"

"Hold, sir," interrupted Lady Helmsford, pale with indignation ; "what do you mean by men of all grades? Heavens! your son never was in such company in his life before, as any one could see. If you venture to address me in this strain—"

"I say men of all grades," interrupted Langley in his turn, but preserving a certain weighty resolute composure that incensed his hearer even more than his words—"I say men of all grades, for they range from my Lord Chedworth to the latest adventurer floating on the tide

of fashion—the reformed pirate, his Excellency Don Juan di Monteiro. Yes, madam, I have thought it my duty to inquire a little into the history of the ‘distinguished foreigner’ admitted to the society of my ward and future daughter-in-law.”

Something of deadly intent in his voice recalled Lady Helmsford to the necessity of self-control. The instinct of love warned her that here was a bitter mortal foe to Monteiro; and also proved to her, as a sudden lightning-flash displays vividly for an instant, on a dark night, the outline of a country hitherto shrouded, that Harold Langley must have observed something to rouse his jealousy—something that had escaped her.

“I think, Mr. Langley,” she said more calmly, “you must be mistaken. I knew Monteiro in Paris: he was received in good society, and well connected both in France and Spain. Some of his people (as in many noble families) may have had to do with buccaneering, but I doubt if he was ever engaged therein. As to myself, it is so new to me to hear disrespectful words, I scarce know how to meet them. I see before me an indignant father, no doubt; but pray be just, sir. Consider that my house is always open to the society I move in. I could not exclude my friends, or seclude my niece in her chamber. She is fair and fresh, and people admire her. I am grieved your son is sick; but you must not take all he says as absolute fact—jealousy may have tinged his view—though, believe me, let the source of his sickness be what it may, it is not love for Maud.”

“How can you tell that, madam?” returned Langley, who had listened with a moody and downcast look to this speech.

“Come, Master Langley!” said the Countess, “surely your own love-making days are not so far bygone that you cannot recall some symptoms of the pleasant disorder?”

“Mine has been a lot so differently cast from your ladyship’s that I have had no time for such fine fancies. Mine has been the light scorn, or, at best, the smiling *compassion* men cast upon one displaced by the error of *others*! Accident has doomed me to poverty and toil

and obscurity ; and if, in the desperate struggle by which I have nearly surmounted all these, my hands have acquired a grasp too strong to relax at the touch of a fine lady's delicate fingers, blame my circumstances, not me. Let me take my ward and go forth. I will be more careful of her safety than you have been."

"Too fast, too fast!" cried Lady Helmsford ; "you cannot take your ward to-day. And, sir, indeed I meant no offense by my careless speech,"—the gloomy strength of the man touched some responsive chord in her many-sided nature. "But you are serious in your intention to remove my niece?"

"I am, madam ! The legal right I have hitherto waived in courtesy to you I shall now enforce."

"I can but say she is unfit to leave the house—she is ill in bed," replied the Countess, watching him narrowly.

Langley was silent for a moment.

"I should like to see her myself, madam."

"You shall," said Lady Helmsford, determined to do nothing he could object to justly, and feeling she had to deal with a man she could neither dominate nor cajole. She rose and rang. "Send Mistress Langley's woman to me!" was her order. And the antagonists kept silent till it was obeyed—a considerable time—but both had ample food for reflection.

When Dorothy entered, and beheld John Langley's dark figure and dour face, she felt, to use her own expression, "as if the life would leave her," and, as usual in cases of great emergency, took refuge in the earlier of her two religious systems—making a furtive sign of the cross.

"How fares your mistress, Dorothy?" asked the Countess.

"Bad enough, my lady," dropping a curtsy to Langley, of which he took no notice ; "she had but broken rest, and is weeping sore at times."

"Her guardian, Mr. Langley, wishes to see her."

"Deed and he can do no such thing, my lady ! She is in her bed, and I do not think she could stand upon her feet if she were to get out of it."

"I desire to see the young lady, in her bed or out of it," returned Langley, with cold persistency; "and I will."

"If you will call to-morrow, or even this evening," said Lady Helmsford, "Mistress Maud shall be ready to receive you."

"Your ladyship is obliging," returned Langley, with a *not* agreeable smile; "much might occur between this and to-morrow, or this and two hours hence. I will ascertain that my niece is in the house now."

"Very well, sir!" cried Lady Helmsford, roused to her highest mettle; "you *shall* see her now, and never again shall you enter my doors; be wise, and do not presume to try my patience too far. If I declare war against you, you will find me no mean antagonist."

"I must even endure the fortunes of war," replied Langley grimly. "You cannot deny my right to see my ward, nor she refuse to receive, even in her bedroom, a man who stands to her in *loco parentis*."

"Sure you wouldn't force yourself into her room!" cried Dorothy. "My lady, it will just finish her to see his——his honor," she rapidly substituted for some expression far from complimentary to his appearance.

"I feel flattered by the supposed effect I may produce; but, madam," to Lady Helmsford, "if I leave without seeing her now, I shall return, backed by authority even you dare not resist."

"Go, Dorothy! prepare your mistress for his coming," was Lady Helmsford's reply, as, with a quick mental glance at the position, she saw the strength which refusal would give to Langley. "Go! I will conduct Mr. Langley myself."

With a look of bewilderment Dorothy obeyed, and hastened with all speed to her young lady's room. She found her partly dressed, as she had already risen when Dorothy had been sent for.

"Oh, my jewel!" she exclaimed, "that black-browed devil of an uncle of yours is coming up the stairs this minit to see you here! Let me do up your hair and wrap your dressing-gown round ye. I swore you were *ill in bed*, but nothing would stop him!"

"But the Countess, Dorothy ! surely she will not permit—"

"Oh, she spake up like a Trojan, and she is coming with him herself. Now just keep up your heart—don't be frightened."

"Certainly not!" replied Maud, trying to be brave while her heart sank within her. "You say my aunt is with him?"

"Yes; and you trust her! She is fit to tear his eyes out—hush! I hear them in the next room."

Dorothy opened the door and said, "My mistress will be with you immediately." Returning, she completed Maud's hasty toilet, and ushered her into the pretty apartment adjoining the bedroom, which was as gay as bright-patterned curtains, pastels, mirrors, and china could make it. Here the Countess stood by the fireplace, drawn up to her full height, her lips compressed and an ominous stillness over her whole figure.

John Langley had placed himself in one of the windows, his face expressive of dogged resolution. Both looked towards Maud as she came in—her pale colorless cheeks and the dark shade under her eyes proving how much she had been shaken by the severe shock she had undergone.

She went straight to Lady Helmsford and offered her cheek to be kissed, then said courteously to Langley:

"Thank you, my uncle, for coming to ask after me. I am sorely upset, but shall no doubt soon recover."

"I hope so," returned Langley, a little startled by her composure, and the peculiar penetrating look she sent into his eyes. "I am pleased to see you so far well; you will be able, to-morrow or next day, to return to the home you quitted so unadvisedly. Your affianced husband lies ill—struck down by fever—and when he is restored I mean to endure no further paltering with your duty. It will be your own fault if your destiny be not fair and smooth."

Strange to say, neither approached nor offered a hand to the other. Langley seemed to feel that some fresh barrier, he knew not what, had arisen between him and

Maud, while she could not bring herself to take a hand which she knew had taken the life of a fellow-creature, and that a near relative. The words he spoke struck a mortal chill through her heart, but pride lent her courage to keep an unbroken front.

"My destiny is not in your hands," she said gravely. "Save on one point, you well know I am ready to yield you obedience."

"And on that point—" began Langley.

"Enough!" interrupted the Countess. "I imagine, Mr. Langley, you must now be satisfied. Let us discuss the question of my niece's removal in the library. You can see yourself it would be injudicious cruelty to persecute the poor child at present. Go to your room, my love; I will see you when I am at liberty. Follow me, Master Langley."

She swept out of the room, and Langley felt compelled to obey. When they reached the library, Lady Helmsford did not offer her guest a chair, but stood by a large writing-table, her eyes fixed upon Langley without speaking for a few moments. At last she exclaimed:

"Well, sir—"

"Well, madam," he returned dryly.

"What are your intentions?"

"To remove my ward so soon as she has recovered the shock of this attack; and wed her to my son, if he recovers the malady she has brought upon him."

"*She* has brought upon him! Pshaw! Don't tell me that your son loves my niece! I know the difference between love and hatred, and if he has any feeling for her it is the latter. I read it in both *your* and his eyes. I believe you are both ready to take a life that balks your schemes. Now, learn my intentions. Maud has taken refuge under my roof. Had a dog done so I would defend him—much more Langdale's daughter. I will *not* give her up to you; but I shall have this wretched marriage dissolved, and wed her to Lord Chedworth, who craves the honor of an alliance with my niece. Before ten days are over I shall petition the King and the Chancellor to transfer the guardianship to *me*, and then you and your love-sick son

may burn Queen Anne's pardon, *if* you find it, and wheedle Lord Sunderland out of the heritage that should be Maud's. Now, sir, do you understand me?"

"I think, madam, we understand each other. There remains only a trial of strength."

Lady Helmsford had rung the bell while she spoke.

"The door," she exclaimed to the servant who entered.

"The door—Mr. Langley is going out."

"I wish you good-day, madam."

The Countess made an elaborate and dignified curtsy as her only reply, and John Langley followed the footman.

On the door-steps he paused and thought a while, then, stepping into his chair, ordered the men to carry him to the Admiralty.

The Countess, still glowing with the pleasurable excitement of having defied Langley, went quickly upstairs to condole with her niece, and found Dorothy bathing her temples with water, as though she were faint.

"The unmannerly brute! The low-bred clown!" cried Lady Helmsford, seating herself beside Maud and taking one of her hands. "He has quite terrified and upset you—nor am I surprised."

"I am not so ill as Dorothy imagines, madam," said Maud faintly, as she pressed Lady Helmsford's hand.

"Deed and she is, my lady," said Dorothy. "Her heart beat so fast when he had gone out she could scarce get her breath. Mark my words, all this fighting about her will just put her in her grave; why, it's enough to curl the blood in her veins!"

"Take courage, Maud," exclaimed the Countess, now roused by her indignation against Langley to tenderness for her niece; "none shall harm you while you are with me, and guided by me! Be advised! Wed Lord Chedworth at once—next week—and you will be rich, adored, free, powerful. Rouse yourself! dress, take courage, come down to dinner. I will send for his lordship—be gracious to him—to-morrow he will implore you personally to have pity on him. You can take a day to consider. Next day he will want to be married at all risks.

I will intercede for him, summon the parson, and then let John Langley do his worst. 'Tis a marriage all must approve ! ”

Anxious, miserable, frightened though she was, Maud could not refrain from a fit of laughter, somewhat hysterical, it is true, at this idea of wedding her out of hand while yet the passionate prayer of her real husband haunted her ear.

“ Ah ! dear aunt,” she said, “ is there no way of disposing of me save in marriage ? Have you no country-seat where you might give Dorothy and myself a nook, where I might see that the gardens were kept in fair order, and Dorothy care for the napery ? We would cost you but little, and oh ! what a boon would be the peace and security ! ”

“ And pray how long would this enterprising bridegroom of yours leave you in peace, foolish child ? I tell you marriage—marriage with my consent or John Langley’s—and marriage with a powerful man, is your only chance.”

“ That’s true for you, my lady,” said Dorothy.

But Maud did not reply at once. At the mention of her husband her cheeks and delicate throat were bathed in a quick crimson flush. From a vague and pleasant dream this husband had suddenly sprung into a startling and embarrassing reality, of which she must not speak even to dear, good Dorothy. This was her sorest trial ; she could take no counsel—she must brood over her difficulty alone.

Meantime Lady Helmsford and Dorothy were executing a sort of duet in favor of a marriage with Lord Chedworth. The noble position, the security, wealth, influence, etc., etc., it would bestow. Dorothy, at the conclusion, jumping to a sort of anti-climax after a momentary lull in the panegyric, exclaiming with a sudden outbreak :

“ Sure he’s mighty old, anyhow, for a young creature like Mistress Maud ! ”

“ Pooh ! nonsense, woman ! ” returned the Countess. “ Come, Maud ! how say you ?—dine with me to-day—

I will send for Lord Chedworth, and your gallant deliverer, Monteiro. We shall be a *parti carrée*—not a bad thing in its way—and see if our four wits cannot devise a plan to defy John Langley.”

“No, dear aunt, I could not leave my room to-day,” cried Maud, her color coming and going. “Leave me to my own thoughts—to perfect quiet—and to-morrow or the next day I may be fitter to devise plans with you. I do so want quiet and repose!”

“Very well, child, I will leave you! I expect Don Juan and the man who helped so largely in your rescue; then to-night I must visit Leicester House to give the history of your rescue—for eager gossip, there is nothing like a Royal Highness. And I am deeply engaged to-morrow. However, rest; you must require it. I will send Sparrow to see you in the evening. Adieu.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was some three or four days after the events above recorded. Monteiro was writing at the table in the principal room of his lodgings. Papers and letters were lying beside him, and in a large chair opposite was seated the huge form of Robilliard, while by the fireplace stood D’Arcy—D’Arcy in his quiet stock-broking garments. Monteiro, after writing for a few minutes, laid down the pen, and taking up an open letter that lay at his elbow, reperused it, the others keeping respectful silence. He was somewhat thinner and more worn-looking than when first we saw him, but his expression was alert and hopeful.

“You have indeed brought me good news, Robilliard. When did this reach you?”

“Early this morning, sir; and I determined to place it in your hand myself.”

“Sir Stephen says the King and his company start for England on the twenty-second. They are to rest a day or two at Osnaburgh, and then press on to the Hague. In ten or twelve days we may count on the old German

being safely lodged at St. James's, and then—and then—for the final stroke of the game!" Monteiro heaved a short, quick sigh. "Sir Stephen had received my last, Robilliard, and so inquired at the place you mentioned for an early opportunity of sending me a letter. At last, Robilliard, at last, the day of reckoning comes!"

"And I do hope, Excellency, you will make the rogue pay the last farthing of the score."

"All I can, old friend; but that will not be half enough. Now, tell me, have you seen nothing of Morley?"

"Not a trace, since the morning of the day Lady Maud was to be carried off; and what's more, he paid up that very day!"

"To stop anxious inquiries, no doubt," remarked Monteiro, who was looking at the paper, whereon he was slowly and with evident care tracing some lines.

"The more I think over it, the more I'm convinced that the chap on the gray horse was the man I crossed swords with, over a fortnight ago, at the top of the Haymarket."

"I can scarce believe it," said Monteiro, without raising his eyes. "Wherefore do you think so?"

"Because, just as we had gathered at the tavern there, near Hatton Garden, something went wrong with the fastening of his vizard, and, as he was adjusting it, I caught a glimpse of his face; it struck me at the moment that I knew it, and since I have remembered the man—he was Captain Langley!"

"So much the worse," replied Monteiro, carefully folding up the note he had written; "the worse for our lady of Langdale if he had succeeded, the worse for himself should I ever be able to punish him. Now, D'Arcy, it is almost time you waited on the Countess of Helmsford; she is most desirous of rewarding you for your share in the rescue of her niece. She is rich, man, and generous—faith! most generous."

"I did not seek to save the young lady for the sake of any reward," returned D'Arcy, making no motion to obey Monteiro's suggestion; "but to spite yon villain Lang-

ley, and pay him back in some measure for his treacherous murder of as noble a captain as ever man served under, also to save an innocent creature. Why—why, sir, had Langley such hatred to your gallant father?”

“In truth, I scarcely know,” said Monteiro, resting his folded arms on the table and speaking thoughtfully; “they had had an interview—what passed thereat I never knew—but I fancy Langley perceived that Mistress Maud would have a protector in my father. Why, my errand to Paris after his death was to carry out his wishes and offer a home with my sister to our young kinswoman. From the time we learned that Lord Langdale was a sufferer for the cause he had so much at heart, my father was eager to knit up the long-severed links of kinship.”

“Ay, he would have been a father to the young lady indeed,” exclaimed Robilliard, drawing forth a pipe. “Has your Excellency no idea who was the clever dog who nabbed young Langley on his wedding-day?”

“I have,” returned Monteiro, leaning back in his chair and speaking with wonderful gravity considering how his eyes laughed; “but I do not mean to betray the secret yet.”

D’Arcy looked up quickly at him, but kept silence.

“*Pardieu!*” cried Robilliard, “I trust he will not trouble the young lady; *you* would be a noble husband for her, Excellency!”

“’Tis not for us to speculate on whom it may please her to honor,” said Monteiro carelessly. “Tell me, D’Arcy, when you found yourself at the theater door with these ruffians, why did you not raise an outcry, dismount and rush in, and so save the noble demoiselle some moments of terror, enough to turn her brain?”

“I did think of it,” said D’Arcy, “but I knew from their talk that the door-keepers were bought. Then I expected to see your honor, for I gave my messenger time to reach you earlier had he not loitered, and I feared to disable myself in the minds of my comrades by showing my game too soon; so while I hesitated, my lady was trapped, and we were off.”

“No matter, D’Arcy, she shall know the good service

you have done. I warrant ye she will bestow some good berth upon you yet when she comes to her own—grand falconer—or master of the horse down at Langdale, when she will have a merry company to make the old walls ring.”

“Ay, sir, and I hope you will be the head of it,” said D’Arcy significantly.

Monteiro frowned, sighed slightly, and rising from his seat, cried :

“By Heaven, D’Arcy, you will be late for my lady ! Be off, man, or you will meet scant favor.”

D’Arcy at this caught up his hat, and nodding to Robilliard stalked into the outer room, followed by Monteiro.

“D’Arcy,” he said in a low voice, “take this note. Be careful, either going in or coming out, to see Gomez, and give it to him unseen by any one. Your Spanish is not first-rate, but you know enough to tell the little devil that it must be given carefully to Mistress Langley. You see, D’Arcy, I am bound to warn her that the King’s return is near ; and—”

“Of course, of course !” exclaimed D’Arcy, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows ; “trust me, the young lady shall have the billet.”

With a bow D’Arcy went off ; and, after a moment’s pause, Monteiro returned to Robilliard with a graver aspect than he wore previously.

“’Tis an honest fellow,” said the old man, nodding towards the door, “and brave ; has had a rough life, worked hard, lived hard, and hasn’t a stiver in his pouch.”

“Nevertheless his age must not be poverty-stricken, Robilliard ; I must see to that.”

“Ay, Excellency ; but how will you manage about yourself ? Forgive a humble friend if he speaks plain ; I have known your childhood, and, *mort de ma vie !* none love you better.”

“Thanks, old true heart ; speak out without fear.”

“Well, you talked of being nigh the bottom of your treasure-chest, how’s that ? Your father’s son ought to be rich.”

“Oh, I can scarcely tell ; my sister’s dowries were

heavy, and quite right too. Then in arranging for my break with the old life, I had much to pay, so as to start the men I left to succeed me fairly. Then I was not—never have been prudent. This plot against John Langley has cost a good round sum ; but let it go.” He clapped Robilliard’s massive shoulder as he spoke. “I’ll win—that is, win nearly all I want, checkmate that knave, reinstate my lady cousin, and then—and then—oh, I shall chalk out a career, never doubt it. I have some marketable qualities which princes value, and at any rate I shall fight my way up if a bullet or a sword-thrust does not lay me low ; all I want is something to start with, and not to pay too dear for it.”

“And you know where to find that,” cried Robilliard ; “I have not done so badly, and now I rest from my labors. My widowed daughter and her son, a quiet, clever, thrifty fellow, care for the business, which will be theirs ; but, my lad—I beg pardon, my son !—I would I saw you the owner of this fine heritage—’tis lost in a woman’s hand ; it will go to feed the gaming-table and the cock-pit. Most likely she will wed some fop who’ll waste her substance and ill-treat herself ; women seldom know a good fellow from a bad.”

“Well, well, my brave old boy ! what will be, will be. We must not rob the young lady by way of securing her happiness. Have a glass of Xeres, Robilliard. I have some rare stuff,” ringing as he spoke.

Robilliard accepted, and for nearly an hour sat enjoying a talk over old times and former scenes, in which he bore by far the larger share. At last, after thoroughly enjoying both the wine and the conversation, Robilliard bade his host adieu. So soon as the door closed upon him the smile faded from Monteiro’s face ; he threw himself into a chair and stretched out his feet to the fire.

“After,” he thought, “ay, after, there will be the grief and the struggle ; fool, weak fool that I was, to risk the loss of a hopeful uncertainty for this pain. But she was so fair, so helpless, I felt so strongly the right to comfort and to keep her. If I had still but played the part of the courteous cavalier, I should have stood a far better

chance now ; I did not dream she would have shrunk from me as she did ; and yet it seems since revealed to me, how startling and repellent an outburst like mine must have been to a delicate girl whom I had not had a chance to woo. For three long months night and day she has been before *my* eyes as my own, while she had before *hers* some pale phantom of a saintly husband—faith ! most unlike the original. I have been my own rival ; was ever anything more whimsical ! Will she ever hear me or believe in me ? ah, it stung my very soul, that speech of hers, ‘ Has that heritage no part in coloring your estimate of me ? ’ How can I ever prove my perfect, simple love ? only by leaving her free—quite free ; and yet this is selfish weakness too ! Shall I let her fall into the hands of some fop who will waste her life and fortune, when I know I am worthier, merely for pride’s sake ? then I shall soon be no more than a soldier of fortune. No ! the thought that she suspects my motives will paralyze my brain, my tongue, when we meet. When will that be ? three whole weary days since she bade me so sweetly, so coldly believe ever in her gratitude, and I have not seen her ! How those lovely blue eyes can deepen and flash with indignation—why not with love ? No, I can never give her up ! And Lady Helmsford—she is a splendid creature, but the devil’s own hinderance. I wish I could have a glimpse into her heart or mind ; if she were sensible now, or generous, I might tell her the whole truth, and what a help she might be.”

The ungrateful Juan quite forgot the ardent admiration he professed and felt for the brilliant Countess a few months before, though always aware that it was at best but an ephemeral fancy.

“ I will dress and visit Lady Helmsford this evening ; perhaps Maud may appear and speak, and smile, and throw some subtle breath of favor to her husband—her husband ! God ! it’s enough to drive a man mad ! ”

So saying almost aloud, Monteiro rose, pushed back his chair with some violence, and proceeded to arrange and lock away his papers.

The three days of which Monteiro complained in his thoughts had been spent by Maud in strict retirement, and passed by the Countess rather agreeably than otherwise.

Monteiro had been a frequent visitor, and though he had spoken and inquired rather too much respecting her niece, it was no more than might be expected considering the danger from which he had rescued her. Nevertheless, Lady Helmsford noticed that he was downcast, pre-occupied, and more than all, abrupt and variable in his manner to herself. She, however, had reached the stage of infatuation in which each new aspect of the adored one is more fascinating than the last. The theory of losses at play being the cause of his gloom, suggested by Beville, took full possession of her mind. It seemed to account for everything, and the proud Countess of Helmsford reveled in the idea of the relief she could afford him—of the passionate gratitude with which he would repay her by love and admiration. If at times painful doubts respecting the possibility of her niece being her rival tormented her with a dim uneasiness, she banished them quickly; for if Monteiro cared for Maud, if he had any tinge of lover-like feeling for the fair girl he had saved, he would certainly have made some effort to see her—some attempt to hold communication with her, and that, the Countess felt sure he had not. On the whole, the horizon of her life looked clear enough, and she would be very kind to poor Maud. It was her inclination—an inclination she felt became her; Monteiro's look and words of admiration when she graphically described her interview with John Langley thrilled her heart. He had said she was brave and noble as she was beautiful, and, but for the presence of Lord Chedworth, and one or two others of her acquaintance, would probably have expressed himself still more warmly.

In society, Lady Helmsford shone in the reflected luster of the romantic incident which had just occurred, and which rumor magnified into the most desperate case of attempted abduction and rescue in modern times. John Langley, too, had as yet made no sign. He no

doubt felt it more prudent to reflect before he acted—and Harold's condition hampered him considerably. He was far from idle, however. He besieged all who could push his interest—from Lord Sunderland down—and flattered himself that at the first audience given by the King his case would be urged by powerful friends. If only he could have the irrevocable deed done before the King's return, all would be well; but the matrimonial part of the scheme bristled with insurmountable difficulties. Meantime, under cover of kindly interest, he kept himself in some degree informed of what was going on at Lady Helmsford's by daily polite inquiries for Mistress Maud Langley.

When that young lady's nerves and senses had calmed down after the terror and excitement of her danger and escape, which had been renewed by the scene with her guardian, she felt a different being from the comparatively light-hearted girl who had started with Lady Helmsford, a few evenings back, all delighted anticipation, to witness a play for the first time.

She felt years older. The possibility suddenly revealed that her father's lands would be restored to her, gave rise to a certain satisfaction, tinged with gravity and tender regret, that the beloved father was not there to enjoy them himself. Perhaps her happiest feelings arose from the hope of being freed from John Langley's clutches—if so joyful a climax could be reached: but the most overpowering and dominant idea was that she had seen face to face and conversed with the man to whom she had given her hand in the old chapel at Langdale—that he had proved in appearance, and apparently in character, the very opposite of all she had imagined.

The sense of the embarrassing marriage bond between them oppressed her. The promise she had given not to reveal Monteiro's real relationship to Dorothy compelled her to brood over it in silence—which was a terrible trial to that faithful but imaginative woman, who had elevated Monteiro into a hero, and was inclined to quarrel with *her taciturn meditative mistress* for not talking about *him*. But Maud's meditations were not all painful; a

strange, half-fearful sense of pleasure streaked their gloom. Never before had she heard such words or met such eyes as her kinsman's (Rupert or Monteiro, she scarce knew which to call him). Instinctively she strove to steady and strengthen herself against the bewildering fascination they wrought upon her. She ought not, she told herself, to believe in a love so sudden and uncalled for; what was she that she should call it forth? Yet—and yet none could merely *act* the part Monteiro had; there was such convincing truth in his looks and tones. Then he had risked his life for her. Stranger though he was, if he indeed loved her truly, fondly as he said, her love was half won. It was the doubt that steadied her judgment, and made her give some earnest thought to the consideration of the mixed motives which he confessed had actuated him at the outset,—revenge for his father's death, and determination not to allow the family inheritance to pass into John Langley's hands; still she could not by any effort of reason efface the deep impression his tenderness and ardor had left upon her. The recollection of the strong throbbing of his heart as he held her against it for a few moments, while lifting her from the carriage, made her own beat painfully fast, and she turned from the disturbing memory with a sort of fear. The most formidable foe, however, to Monteiro's influence over her was his admirer, Mistress Letitia Sparrow. The mutual sufferings of herself and Maud on the night of the adventure had drawn them somewhat towards each other, besides which Maud had always felt a sort of compassionate kindness towards the object of Lady Helmsford's contemptuous patronage.

Mistress Sparrow therefore paid Maud numerous visits, and was never weary of describing her terror and sufferings in the sort of black-hole to which the treacherous Thomas had consigned her, the conversation generally ending by some passages relating to Monteiro, in which, vibrating between her fear of disobeying the Countess, her anxiety to preserve Maud from crossing that imperious dame, and her desire to do no wrong to Monteiro, poor Mistress Letitia contrived to give, as though reluc-

tantly, a very curious and doubtful impression of his relations to Lady Helmsford. This completed the circle of Maud's distrust. To conceal from the kinswoman who sheltered and protected her, her entanglement with the man who was, or had been, that kinswoman's accepted lover, was an act of treachery from which Maud Langley—faithful and true by nature, as well as training—shrank with horror. Some means she must and would devise to communicate with Monteiro, and implore him to reveal the whole truth to Lady Helmsford. She was lovely, noble, wealthy—why should he not have sought her before the wild scheme of wedding herself, as a temporary expedient, had come into his head? and now, if a shadow of double-dealing disgraced him, he would be utterly unworthy of her, be his tones ever so tender, his eyes ever so ardent. So reflecting, and tormenting herself almost into a fever, Maud sought in vain to find some means of expressing her wishes to her mysterious husband. From faithful Dorothy's aid she was cut off, and the danger and shame attending the attempt (in her eyes) forbade her seeking any other. In the restlessness of this condition, she began many occupations and laid them down again. She had gone into her bedchamber to seek her embroidery, and returned to the seat by the fire she had just quitted. Her handkerchief lay on a small work-table beside her—she raised it to find her scissors, and, behold! there lay a small peculiarly-folded note. Maud, with a startled look round to assure herself she was alone, opened it and read:

“Sweet lady, keep up your heart! I have good news from Hanover. My friend has already interested the King in your favor: they are on their homeward journey. Courage, patience, silence for a few more days, and, on my honor, you shall be free of all shackles! Destroy this.

“Your devoted kinsman and servant,

“RUPERT.”

Breathlessly, with a beating heart, Maud read this

through several times, and then carefully obeyed the injunction at the conclusion. Was it possible that her sore trial was so nearly over? Rupert, then, was going to be noble and generous. No doubt he was, after all, attached, perhaps engaged, to Lady Helmsford. All therefore would end well; nevertheless, Maud wept.

While Maud meditated thus in the seclusion of her chamber, the usual movement to and fro pervaded the great mansion. Notes and visitors and the hundred and one purveyors of fashion and finery came and went. The hall porter at Lady Helmsford's had no sinecure place. It was considerably past her ladyship's usual time for going out, her carriage waited at the door, when D'Arcy presented himself.

"I do not think you can see her ladyship," said the porter, shaking his head; "she is even now going forth. But stay a moment! she may notice you in passing."

To while away the time, D'Arcy turned to speak to Gomez, who was loitering about the hall in a sort of undress, fantastic but less magnificent than his evening attire. Soon Lady Helmsford sailed downstairs, in all the glories of a deep-red velvet sacque, and a hat with plumes of black and crimson.

Her eye was attracted by the tall stranger, whose bearing was so out of keeping with his garb.

"Who have we here?" she asked.

"The gentleman says your ladyship ordered him to call."

"Indeed! Your name, sir?" turning full upon him.

"D'Arcy, an it please your ladyship!" he replied, bowing low.

"D'Arcy!" she repeated, with a gracious smile, "I have expected you! come with me!" She turned into the library as she spoke, D'Arcy, a little awed by her grand air, following. "You have been over-long in obeying my summons," said the Countess, looking sharply into his rugged, weather-beaten face. "Did not Don Monteiro tell you I desired you to call!"

"He did, my lady; but—"

"I wished to thank and reward you for the help you

rendered in saving Mistress Langley from the assassins who had seized her."

"But I wish for no reward, madam. I did my duty, and am proud to have been useful to the young lady."

"'Tis not what you wish, but what I will," returned the Countess, touching a bell that lay beside her. "Send Chifferil to me," she said to the servant who came in answer. "What have you been, sir?—a soldier!"

"A little of everything, madam! I have fought afloat and ashore. When the Williamites made Ireland too hot, I served in the Irish Brigade, and helped to keep back the Prince of Holstein Beck's Artillery for a while at the famous fight at Blenheim."

"Ha!" cried the Countess, "that is no recommendation here."

"I should have thought it was," returned D'Arcy, with an unmoved front. "The Langdales were ever true to the King over the water."

"I am not a Langley," exclaimed Lady Helmsford; "nor must you talk treason. Whose service are you in now?"

"Don Juan di Monteiro's, my lady, for the present."

"For the present? Do you not then mean to stay with him?"

"He says he will not want me long. He talks of taking service with the English King; and I do not think he wants any followers."

"You have known this gentleman long?"

"I have."

"And his people?"

"I knew his father."

"And what was he?" cried the Countess, unable to resist the temptation to gratify her curiosity.

"As brave and skillful a sailor as ever handled a ship!"

"Yes, yes! but what was his name? What service was he in?—was he a nobleman?"

"What was his name?—the same as his son's. I was a while in *his* service. I never asked whom he served—he was a real nobleman!" He had answered her questions, yet told her nothing; but the entrance of Chifferil

prevented her pursuing the subject. The little secretary bowed low, cleared his throat nervously, and stood waiting orders.

"How did you find out the plot against my niece?" asked Lady Helmsford, not noticing Chifferil.

"I did not, as you might say, find it out, my lady; but I suspected, from the way the fellows talked of fastening the carriage-doors, that the lady was not willing to go—and no pay would have tempted me to carry off a woman against her will. Then I heard her name, and that she was sister, or niece, or something to your ladyship, so I determined to let my old commander's son know the mischief that was brewing."

"Quite right. You were not exactly in his service then?"

"Certainly not, or I wouldn't have been engaged in such devilry!"

"I suppose Don Monteiro never employed you to carry off any lady?" asked the Countess, with a pleasant smile, but a keen, sharp glance.

"Not against her will, anyhow," returned D'Arcy, with a twinkle in his dark eyes. "He is too much of a gentleman for that."

"Chifferil," exclaimed Lady Helmsford, thinking, perhaps, that this fruitless cross-examination was not very dignified; "you must take this worthy gentleman to your bureau; give him refreshments, and the present I designed for him—no words, sir. The laborer is worthy of his hire; we owe you much. You have, I think, already given the name of the villain who engaged you in this vile plot to my Lord Chedworth, who is directing the inquiries concerning it."

"I have, madam."

"And it is?" she asked.

"Morley—Samuel Morley. I knew him long ago in Spain."

"What a motley crew you wanderers are!" said the Countess contemptuously. "Well, sir, I leave you in Chifferil's hands, and depend on what help you can give us towards tracing these wretches."

"That your ladyship may ; but I doubt they have escaped beyond the sea. They had money."

"Where could they have found it then, save with the unknown bridegroom?" D'Arcy made no reply to this conjecture ; and the Countess, with a bend of her lofty head, bid him a gracious "good-day" and left the room.

"Begad, she's a great lady entirely !" said D'Arcy, looking after her with much admiration ; "and I'll go bail she combs *your* wig for you sometimes !"

"Combs my wig ! my lady the Countess !" exclaimed Chifferil in utter surprise.

D'Arcy laughed a short and somewhat hoarse cachination, and, laying his hand on Chifferil's shoulder, said : "Why did you look away, my reverend signor, and not notice my attempt to greet you?"

"Because—oh ! because—my good sir, 'twould never do for my lady to know we had knowledge of each other—never—believe me."

"Aha, Mr. Chifferil ! you are more cautious than wise. Let me tell you that danger met half way is half baffled. If your great dame finds now that we are acquaint, she'll smell mischief ; but 'tis of no great matter. Ay, man, but she's wild about my young Captain ; I could see it with half an eye."

"It does not become us to conjecture respecting my noble mistress's fancies," said Chifferil uneasily. "Will you come with me, Master D'Arcy?"

He led the Irishman across the hall and down a passage to his own den, meeting on their road Mrs. Beville, who dropped a graceful curtsy and shot a curious glance at Chifferil's tall companion. "I do not like that woman," said Chifferil as he closed the door ; "she is smooth and subtle, and has my lady's ear."

"She is a tidy-looking baggage enough," quoth D'Arcy, "and has a shrewd eye. How is my client, Mistress Dorothy ? I should like to pay her a visit."

"Pray do not think of such a thing !" cried Chifferil, his bristles ready to stand on end under his wig with fear ; "least said, soonest mended, in this house." And he applied himself to unlock an escritoire, from whence

he took a small packet. "Here, my good sir, are seven gold sovereigns which her ladyship charged me to bestow upon you—just to buy some memento of her approbation."

"She's a princess!" said D'Arcy, accepting the coin. "As I have said, I want no guerdon, but I would not offend her ladyship by rejecting her liberality."

"Now for some refreshment," said Chifferil, with a strong effort at a jovial air. He rang, and gave some orders to the servant who answered the summons. Then he and the Irishman sat down to partake of wine and food, during which process the little man made some wonderful attempts to pump his companion, who retaliated with considerable success, the result being that, as D'Arcy took his homeward route to "Lamb's," he grinned and muttered to himself, "My lady the Countess, indeed, and ten thousand a year to be had for the asking. Begad! it would be mighty fine; but he'll never ask her. No! He'd give her beautiful self, hat and feathers and all, for one smile from that slender colleen, or I don't know what eyes say."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE evening of the same day Mistress Sparrow brought a message from the Countess requesting her niece's company, as Lord Chedworth and one or two others were at dinner, and Lady Helmsford hoped she would not refuse to join them in the drawing-room.

Maud consented more readily than Mistress Letitia expected, and was moreover unusually careful about her dress, which was very simple, a robe of pale gray taffetas and a white muslin sacque adorned with black ribbons; no ornament in her wavy brown hair, but a tuft of early violets in one angle of her square-cut corsage. The negro boy had brought them to her that afternoon, but did not say whence they came.

Mistress Sparrow had been ordered to accompany

Maud—to her great satisfaction ; for though entering it only on sufferance, she never was so happy as when fluttering in what she termed “elegant society.”

It was the first time Maud had nerved herself to venture out of the privacy of her own apartments since her terrible adventure, and she felt somewhat ashamed of the effort it cost her. She told herself it would not do to grow morbid—that a little more courage and endurance would clear up many mysteries. For whatever might be Monteiro’s entanglement with her aunt, she felt compelled and disposed to trust him in all matters apart from love.

The Countess and her guests were sipping their coffee in the smallest of the three drawing-rooms, a charming apartment not too large for a sense of comfort. The hangings of amber, the cabinets and furniture of highly-polished walnut inlaid in delicately fine patterns of white, the chairs and sofas covered with amber satin richly embroidered with many-colored birds, butterflies, and flowers, china and lacquered ornaments, gave a rich and variegated aspect to the consoles and brackets. To modern eyes there would have seemed a lack of books and periodicals, those circulating mediums of thought, but neither Lady Helmsford nor those with whom she associated missed these dear familiar companions of modern life. Lady Helmsford was standing before the fire, her cup in one hand, talking with a highly-dressed fair little woman whom Maud recognized to be Mistress Ferrars, one of the reigning beauties (a constant companion of the Countess), and a gentleman whom she had not seen before. He was of middle age, and far from handsome, but distinguished and intellectual looking, with evidently prepossessing manners. He was soberly and handsomely attired in brown velvet, laced with gold, and wore a bag-wig and sword. At a little distance, and conversing in a group, stood Lord Chedworth, Sir Eustace Blount, and the clergyman Maud had seen before. Two footmen were collecting the coffee-cups, one held the door open, and directly she entered, Lord Chedworth advanced to meet our heroine, who

observed, with a curious mixture of relief and disappointment, that Monteiro was not present.

"At last fair Mistress Langley deigns to shine forth and gladden the eyes of her admiring friends!" quoth my lord, with his most graceful bow. "I do earnestly hope, madam, you have recovered the *bouleversement* which this lawless attempt must have occasioned you."

"I thank you, my lord, for all the trouble you have taken concerning it," returned Maud; "I am now myself again."

"Come hither, Maud," called Lady Helmsford from the fireside; Sir Eustace and the parson stood aside, bowing, to let her pass, and Lord Chedworth addressed Mistress Sparrow in a kindly but somewhat jocular tone respecting her imprisonment on the occasion of the late outrage. "Come hither, child," repeated the Countess; "you know Mistress Ferrars" (Maud executed the profound curtsy which the occasion required). "This is my niece," continued Lady Helmsford to the gentleman in brown velvet. "Maud, let me present Mr. Craggs to you." He bowed low, looking keenly, yet kindly, into the fair young face before him, while she regarded him with some interest, having heard of him from her aunt as the friend of the celebrated Mr. Pope of Twickenham, and one whose position as Secretary of State might possibly enable him to befriend her. James Craggs was a man of some note at that time; a shrewd politician, a fluent speaker, a capable man of business, fond of literature, he had been appointed Secretary on the retirement of Addison.

"We have to congratulate the young lady," said Craggs in a kindly, fatherly manner, "on her escape. As your ladyship was saying, the very attempt shows that there is a tolerably widespread belief in the existence of the missing pardon. I have, by the request of my Lords Sunderland and Berkeley, caused careful search to be made for it, but in vain. I have also inquired of my predecessor, Mr. Addison, if his memory can afford any assistance, but he remembers nothing."

"Oh, it was before his time!" said Lady Helmsford.

"It must have been just before the late Queen's death that it was granted, and we all know what confusion ensued."

"Pray, Mistress Langley," lisped Mistress Ferrars, "were you not sorely frightened when the wretches shut you in the coach?"

"So frightened, madam, that I can scarce support the memory of it."

"No!" interposed the Countess. "The mention of it drives the blood from her cheeks; let us talk of something else. Pray, Mr. Craggs, have you any news from Paris? 'tis some days since I had letters."

"There is nothing of much consequence, madam, save that Law's Bank has been declared 'Royal.' The shares, they say, have gone up to twenty-fold the original value!"

"La, sir, you do not say so!" cried Mistress Ferrars. "Why, that goes beyond *our* famous scheme! Do you know, dear Lady Helmsford, I have pledged my diamond necklace to add a few more shares to those I have already bought. Has your ladyship invested largely?"

"No!" said the Countess; "I have never been so much tempted as others. The words of a curious, witty, cynical little Frenchman I knew last year in Paris, have ever since been present to me—Monsieur d'Espine—has your reverence ever met him? for I know you have frequented the best company in that charming capital, when you traveled with my Lord Dormer," continued Lady Helmsford, addressing the clergyman.

"No, madam, but I think I have heard of him."

"Well, he used to take a pinch of snuff whenever Law and the Mississippi Company were mentioned, and quote the King of Sardinia, who told Law he was not powerful enough to ruin himself."

"Nevertheless, madam," returned Mr. Craggs, "many powerful intellects have looked carefully into our South Sea scheme, and perceived no flaws."

"True, sir; but my little sage used to say further, that *one day* people would want to turn their paper into gold, *and then* would be the beginning of sorrows."

"Cynics and sages seldom have much to invest," said the clergyman.

"Moreover, they would lose their character if they were to run after filthy lucre, like us of the common unintellectual rabble!" added Lord Chedworth.

"Fie! fie! to speak of yourself by such naughty words," cried Mistress Ferrars.

"And what news of the King?" asked Sir Eustace.

"Oh! his Majesty is on his homeward way," replied Craggs. "They are busy dusting and whitewashing at St. James's. It is supposed, if the winds be not unfavorable, he may land to-morrow week."

Maud's heart beat quick as she listened. Monteiro's note had taught her to look to the King's arrival for the solution of her difficulties—liberation from the Langleys, and freedom of action on her own part; but her nerves quivered as she looked at her aunt, so gracious and smiling—quivered with shame and pain, as she thought of the deceit practiced on her.

Meantime, Craggs was still speaking. "All the world seems unusually anxious for his Majesty's return. My lady the Countess here, and Lord Sunderland, and John Langley—you know Langley of the Admiralty?" (to Lord Chedworth); "he has wearied us with inquiries."

"Ay, and Captain Harold his son—" began Sir Eustace, and then checked himself. "He is sick, I find—ill of fever; but the curiosity of the illness is, that first his man told me he had broke his arm, and next day denied it and swore I must have been mistaken, that he could never have so said. I went again, like a true brother-in-arms, to inquire for my comrade, and lo! his cruel parent had carried him off to his dreary mansion in Great Queen Street! Rather extraordinary treatment for a fever."

"Heavens! Sir Eustace," cried Mrs. Ferrars, "are you not speaking somewhat recklessly before Mistress Langley?"

"If so, I ask a thousand pardons."

"Nay, sir, I already know of my cousin's indisposition," said Maud very calmly.

"Sparrow," called Lady Helmsford, "tell them to fetch the card-table. Come hither, Sir Eustace ; I would speak with you ;" and she drew the young baronet aside to question him about Harold's condition.

"I presume so young and fair a lady as yourself does not care for cards," said the parson to Maud.

"Nay, sir, I do not see why youth and beauty should incapacitate the owner for the pleasures of play !" exclaimed Mistress Ferrars jealously ; she was an ingrained gambler.

"Nay, indeed," echoed the polite viscount ; "I should rather say there is a degree of intellectual attraction in gaming which both these fair ladies would be quick to feel."

Mistress Ferrars tapped him approvingly with her fan.

"In truth," said Maud, smiling, "I fear I am too dull to appreciate the attraction his lordship speaks of."

"Mistress Langley loves reading and music best," said Mistress Letitia, with a complimentary smirk ; "'tis ravishing to hear her touch the harpsichord."

"Indeed !" cried Lord Chedworth and Mr. Craggs together ; "let us petition for a few strains," added the latter.

"Come," said Lady Helmsford, returning from her short conference with Sir Eustace ; "who will play quadrille ?" and she took up one of the packs of cards laid on the table that had just been set out, and began to shuffle them, throwing out the fours, tens, and eights, in preparation for her favorite game. "What is it, Maud !" she continued, observing the gentlemen were asking her something.

"Only that we petition Mistress Langley to charm us with a *sonata* or an *aria*," said Mistress Letitia.

"Go, play something, child," said the Countess kindly ; "you have some skill. The harpsichord is in the next room, you will not disturb us ; go, Sparrow, open it, and see that the fire is good. Mistress Ferrars, we will take Mr. Craggs and the parson for our partners ; when my lord and Sir Eustace have had their ears sufficiently tickled they may cut in."

"Suffer me to lead you to the music-room," said Lord Chedworth, taking Maud's hand with ceremonious respect, and, followed by Sir Eustace, he conducted her to the harpsichord.

Maud did not dream of refusing ; she was, indeed, too much taken up with her fast increasing fears lest Monteiro would not come, to feel any nervousness about playing. She had made up her mind (for she feared to employ any secondary medium of communication between them) to slip a little note, requesting him to contrive an interview, into his hand herself. What a strong effort of will over pride and the shyness induced by her peculiar relationship to this new-found kinsman such a step entailed, can hardly be described ; nothing short of her eager desire to act faithfully towards her aunt could have strengthened her to take it ; and now, perhaps the opportunity she had sought would be lost. However, though a little silent and tremulous, she contrived to present a composed aspect, and sat down to the harpsichord with a sense of being rescued from talk and questions.

The instrument was so placed that, sitting at it, she could not see the door ; which, when she was more than half way through a delicate *sonata* of Beethoven's, was opened by a footman, who, not seeing his mistress among the listeners, was about to lead Monteiro, who followed him, into the next room, but the new guest touched his arm.

"Do not disturb the music," he said ; "I will introduce myself when it is over."

The man retired ; and Monteiro, with a silent bow to Mistress Sparrow and Lord Chedworth, stood a little apart listening in deep thought or attention.

When Maud had touched the last chord lingeringly, she sat still for a moment, hearing, though not heeding, Lord Chedworth's compliments on her skill, her taste, the additional magic which such accomplishments bestowed even on beauty and grace. Then Monteiro's voice, answering some question of Mistress Sparrow's, struck her ear.

"Your gallant champion is here," said my lord, and

Maud, subduing by a strong effort a quivering of the nerves and a decided inclination to run away, turned and met his eyes for the first time since that eventful night.

Monteiro, who wore a rich suit of dark maroon brocade with chased gold knee and shoe buckles, did not attempt to approach her; he merely bowed low in acknowledgment of her salute. Both Sir Eustace Blount and Lord Chedworth now besought Mistress Langley to delight them again. She, hesitating, feeling that once Monteiro had passed into the next room her opportunity would be gone, turned to the harpsichord and touched a few notes, then rising, exclaimed:

"I can remember no more without music. There is some in that stand, is there not?"

Lord Chedworth and Sir Eustace flew to place it before her, then forcing herself to address him she said, "Monsieur di Monteiro, I trust your arm is no longer painful."

He started to her side.

"No, dear madam, 'tis almost well." Their eyes met, even through his bronzed skin the rising color showed in Monteiro's cheek. "And you," he said, "are you quite your own calm self again?"

"Scarcely," returned Maud, with a slight, irrepressible, but conscious smile; "I feel as though I should never dare to cross the threshold again."

"I trust such discomfort will ere long be removed," said Monteiro significantly.

Here Lord Chedworth laid some music, both printed and manuscript, before her.

"There is a choice, where I hope you may find something familiar," he observed.

"I did not know you were a musician," said Monteiro.

"Do you not also sing?"

"Only when alone."

"Perhaps," he almost whispered, "I may one day be so blest as to hear you."

Maud understood him, and nearly faltered in her purpose; but she was improving in self-control, so she looked *gravely and steadily* at him.

"I used only to sing for my father," she said, bending

to look at the music which lay on the harpsichord. She began to turn it over with one hand, while with the other she affected to rearrange her bouquet of violets, but really drew forth the note which had cost her so much resolution to write.

Sir Eustace was, at that moment, occupied by an examination of the beauties of Mab and Tab, who, when Lady Helmsford received in the present unceremonious manner, were generally of the company. While Lord Chedworth, though naturally jealous of the distinguished-looking Spaniard, was too well-bred to interrupt a conversation in which he had no part, stood back for a moment, waiting Mistress Langley's selection from the music.

"Do you know anything of music, Monsieur di Monteiro?" she asked, her heart beating, and hardly able to articulate the words; as, glancing at those who were near, yet not too near, she caught the watched-for opportunity, and suddenly placed a little twisted billet upon the sheet before them.

"My knowledge is less than my love," replied Monteiro, instantly covering it with his hand, and almost as quickly half-turning towards the company, putting it in his bosom, thrusting his hand within his waistcoat with an easy natural gesture, and letting it rest there a few minutes.

"I know none of these," cried Maud, while she turned pale and dizzy with horror at her own daring. "I will try and play from memory."

She sat down and tried to recall a "minuet," but her touch was uncertain, and she soon broke down.

"Can you forgive my so soon marring the melody?" she cried to Lord Chedworth, who immediately replied in his usual strain of polished compliment; under cover of which Monteiro said softly:

"You try yourself too much;" and then walked away into the next room.

"Ah, Don Juan!" cried Lady Helmsford, "have you been here long?"

"Only a few moments, madam; time enough to hear

some sweet strains which I would not permit your servant to disturb by announcing me."

"Ah! I trust you bring me good luck, Monteiro?" said the Countess; "I have had rare ill-fortune to-night."

"Indeed, belle Comtesse, I am not like to mend it; I have lost heavily in my own game of late;" burning to read Maud's note, and thinking of the sad, grave, warning look she had cast upon him, Monteiro sighed—a slight, short sigh. It caught Lady Helmsford's quick ear, however; she turned her great lustrous bold eyes to her "favored guest" with a wonderfully soft expression.

"How is that, sir? I must scold you for your recklessness in venturing to play with the merciless gamblers of this wicked city."

Monteiro made no reply; and, thus confirmed in her hopes and suspicions, the Countess applied herself to her cards till the game, which had almost been played out when Monteiro came in, was ended.

"Have you spoken to Maud?" asked Lady Helmsford; "she is scarce herself yet, poor child."

"Pray," asked Craggs, "is this the gentleman who was so fortunate as to rescue Mistress Langley?"

"It is; let me present Don Juan di Monteiro to Mr. Secretary Craggs."

The gentlemen bowed.

"Pray, sir," said the latter, "are you lately from Spain?"

"No, sir, I came last from France."

"Tis not your first visit to England, from your command of our tongue?"

"It is not, sir; but I am half English, and part of my errand here is to request admission into the English service."

"Indeed; I am sure the service of so distinguished a gentleman ought to be welcome."

"If I understand him aright," said the parson, "I heard Don Juan state his wish to become English through the medium of a fair English wife."

"The most agreeable method," returned Monteiro, *laughing*.

"Madam," said Mr. Craggs to the Countess ; "I must wish your ladyship good-night."

"What ! so soon, Mr. Secretary ?"

"Yes, madam ; I am bound to show myself at Lady Sunderland's rout. Indeed, I had hoped to escort your ladyship thither. Don Monteiro, adieu ! Should matters unfortunately culminate in warfare betwixt us and Spain, dare we count upon you ?"

"Sir, I prefer England to all other lands, and, if permitted to adopt her service, she will find no truer son than myself."

"That's frank at any rate. My Lady Helmsford, sweet Mistress Ferrars, gentlemen, good-night."

Mr. Secretary Craggs bowed himself away, stopping to say a few kindly words to Maud as he passed out.

"Tell me, my dear Countess," cried Mistress Ferrars, "are you going to the great sale in Soho Square to-morrow ? Lady Betty Conyers', you know ? she is quite bankrupt, and everything goes to the hammer."

"Indeed ! I had forgotten," returned the Countess carelessly.

"Oh ! there will be the greatest rarities—pictures and lace ; you know her point was divine. Then the china, second only to my Lord Chedworth's ; do come, dear Lady Helmsford, we are sure to find monstrous bargains."

"I dare say I shall look in ; what is the time appointed ?"

"At noon it commences ; be sure you are early !"

"I am told these auctions are among the sights of London !" observed Monteiro, who was leaning on the back of Lady Helmsford's chair. "I should like, as the French say, to assist at one."

"Then come with me to-morrow," said the Countess.

"You are ever best as well as fairest," exclaimed Monteiro in the conventional tone of compliment. "I shall willingly attend you, but I am engaged in the first part of the forenoon."

"I can await you," said Lady Helmsford, opening and shutting her fan, while she seemed to examine its pattern.

"La, sir! you are indeed honored," cried Mistress Ferrars.

"But, madam," returned Monteiro, with a low bow, "I could not reconcile myself to keep a lady, and *such* a lady, waiting—I should lose my head, mismanage my business, and hurry through my appointment; permit me to wait upon you at this scene of traffic to-morrow, between twelve and one; will this meet your approval?"

"Yes, let the arrangement stand," said the Countess shortly.

"And now, dear madam, shall we resume our play?" said Mistress Ferrars, fingering the cards with some impatience.

"Certainly," returned the hostess; "but if you do not object, let my good Mistress Sparrow play for me; she will enormously enjoy it, and I will pay her stakes?"

Mistress Ferrars made a little grimace. "As you like, she will hardly play so good a game as you do! ask Sir Eustace to come and be my partner."

"Wherefore, madam, reject me?" asked the chaplain.

"La, sir," returned the beauty insolently, "it is but natural the parson should be partner with the *dame de compagnie*."

Sir Eustace obeyed the summons readily; he was weary of a *tête-à-tête* with Letitia, to which Lord Chedworth's devotion to Maud had reduced him.

All were now assembled in the yellow drawing-room. Maud glad to listen to Lord Chedworth, who, with the tact of a kind heart, which really underlay his artificial manner, led the conversation far afield, in compassion for the fair girl whose nerves had evidently not yet recovered the cruel shock they had sustained. While on a settee, at some distance from the rest, Lady Helmsford sat, leaning back with a slightly fatigued air, in deep conversation with Monteiro, who, resting one knee on a *prie-dieu* chair in front of her, had placed his folded arms on the top, and occasionally stole a glance at Maud and Lord Chedworth, who were conversing so amiably by the fire.

"Yes, they get on very well," said Lady Helmsford,

following the look and answering it. "My lord is monstrosously pleasant, quite young of his years. I think I could like him myself, only you see he is bespoke. He is delicate too, and is not over-eager to urge his suit—the best way to win a proud shy girl like Maud!"

"Is it? is it?" said Monteiro impatiently. "'Tis a style of wooing suited to the calm temperament of age! If I ever wooed, I fear I would err in another direction!"

"If you *ever* wooed," laughed Lady Helmsford. "Would you persuade *me*, Juan, that you are a saint or an anchorite?"

"Heaven knows I have been neither!" he returned, smiling; "but at any rate I strive to be honest."

"Ah! dear friend," said Lady Helmsford lightly, "you and your wooing would never suit her, nor she you; she is so cold and colorless, the very stuff from which to form an immaculate great lady; but come, Monteiro, you really do not give me the confidence our friendship warrants. Who are you, mysterious man?"

"You shall know, dear lady, before any one, but not yet."

"Well, Juan! I trust you; but tell me, you have been gloomy, you have looked worn, depressed. Have you lost heavily?"

"Heavily. I scarce know how much; but of this too you must not speak to me till I can tell you all; there is no use in questioning, I will not reply." He spoke with a certain resolution, none the less firm because it was playful.

"But," he continued, "what you have told me of Harold Langley, confirms suspicions I before had. I must speak to Blount. Could this attempt be traced home to Mistress Langley's own guardian, what a weapon to your hand!"

After some more talk the card-players rose, and the party gathered round a tray of wine and macaroons.

Monteiro, with the tact peculiar to himself, contrived a few words with Maud while Lady Helmsford attended to her guests. "I have read your note; I will find the op-

portunity soon. Maud! have you forgiven me for my ungoverned outburst? do you believe in me?"

"Ah! Monsieur di Monteiro! I know not what to believe. I want most of all that you should grant the request I shall make when we meet."

"'Tis unlikely I shall refuse, unless it is something hurtful to yourself. You are going? and I dare not even kiss your hand?"

"*De grace*, Monsieur di Monteiro! spare me these words!"

"What! are you about to retire, Maud?" said the Countess, coming towards them. "Lord Chedworth, Mistress Langley wishes you good-night."

The chivalrous nobleman approached, took the hand she offered, and raised it with an air of devotion to his lips. Maud smiled graciously upon him, and Monteiro made a quick step towards them, stopped himself, and turned away to address Sir Eustace. The Countess, strange to relate, missed seeing this expressive movement; Mistress Ferrars at that moment was making her *adieux*.

CHAPTER XX.

THE note which Maud Langley had found so difficult to compose was a source of mixed pain and pleasure to its recipient, in which the former largely predominated. He read it over and over again, although its simplicity and brevity rendered the meaning clear.

"Sir," it ran, "I do beseech you contrive to speak with me alone. I have somewhat of importance to say.—Yours gratefully, M. L."

She was in some perplexity, and she trusted him enough to make an advance which he could see cost her an effort. Well, he would prove worthy of it by trying for the present to renounce the lover's tone, to leave her quite free, though a few days more would put a fresh barrier between them. She would turn a new page in her young life, and find herself hedged round with the

dignity of rank and wealth ; while the first chapter of *his* would close, not indeed with defeat, but with fortune's gifts exhausted, and new ones to be extorted from the future.

The tone of the note was utterly cold ; but that was to be expected, considering their peculiar relations. It was the "Yours gratefully" to which he specially objected. She must not imagine herself bound to him by any gratitude : he wanted her free unbought affection ; nor did he feel himself unworthy of it. True, his complications with the Countess would be hard to explain to a young girl with a high unattainable standard before her mind ; but with Monteiro himself they had not a feather weight. From the hour he had with passionate chivalry vowed himself to his unconscious bride, the beautiful Lady Helmsford had been nothing, and less than nothing, to him—only so far as she might be useful to her niece ; and Monteiro, or Rupert Langley, chafed angrily at the species of double-dealing into which he found himself almost unavoidably driven in consequence of his former equivocal acquaintance with the Countess.

At present, however, all considerations were merged in the absorbing question, how to carry out Maud's welcome injunction to see her alone. He had at all events prepared the way to do so by the appointment to meet her ladyship at the auction—an appointment he intended to keep, for he knew Lady Helmsford would wait for him. Why could he not avow all, and rid himself of this cursed necessity for feigning ? But he dared not ! He could not blind himself to her passionate fondness. He felt she was a woman capable of generosity, but also of cruel pitiless revenge ; and which mood would sway the noble lady when she found her niece was her rival—her successful rival—was a doubtful and a very serious question, while the means of vengeance lay ready to her hands, in John Langley and his son. Would that Maud had listened to him, and converted their temporary and scarcely legal marriage into a real one ; she would then indeed have been safe ! But now that he calmly thought over that stormy yet tenderly remembered interview, he could not

wonder at her refusal. If there was any woman of rank and reputation under whose care he could place her until, as a wealthy minor, the Chancellor would be her guardian, he could then afford to be more candid with Lady Helmsford—but he knew none.

“The upshot of all the doubts and difficulties,” he thought, with much bitterness, as he rang for Victor to take away his scarcely-eaten breakfast, “will be that I shall lose her. Everything is against me—her entanglement in this maddening sort of marriage with me, which makes her more unapproachable than even marriage with another—the irrepressible avowal with which, fool that I was, I frightened her here in this room—her very gratitude, of which I cannot and would not avail myself. There are wild impulses that sometimes almost impel me to a forcible assertion of my rights, by running away with her, like the other ruffian! but it would be a brace of ruffians then, indeed! God forbid I should ever attempt to grasp such a delicate flower so rudely; she is different from all other women I have had anything to say to.—Well, Victor! What news?”

“The brave D’Arcy is below, and wishes to speak with your Excellency.”

“Send him up—and how goes the time, Victor?”

“’Tis eleven struck.”

“What! have I been meditating here over an hour? Give me my writing-materials.”

Victor obeyed, and left the room.

A tap at the door soon announced D’Arcy.

“Whence come you?” asked Monteiro, without looking up from his writing.

“From going to and fro, your honor,” replied the old soldier, with a grim smile. “I spent a mighty agreeable evening at Lamb’s last night.”

“I hope you kept sober,” said Monteiro, looking up quickly.

“I did so, sir; though I was bound to drink my lady the Countess’s health; a fine beautiful woman as ever I looked on!—faith! a king wouldn’t be too good for her—rich and generous—”

"There, there ! I don't want to hear your admiration of Lady Helmsford. Who were you drinking with at Lamb's ?"

"Some fellows I met long ago in Germany, and one of them let out he had seen Morley—or, as he called him, Strange—in a wild country sort of place, away north of Brookgreen, and that he was sick because of a cut in his head. So I thought I would ride round that way this morning and have a look : Robilliard found me a horse."

"Well, what did you see ?" asked Monteiro, laying down his pen.

"I did not see Morley, or Strange, but I saw one of the postilions, the one that rode the leader *that* night. I knew him at once : the postilions you see had no masks, but I had, so he did not know me."

"Whereabouts is this place ?" said Monteiro, with interest.

"I can scarce describe it to you, sir, for you don't know the country round London, but I could lead you there. I went around Chelsea way—by Buckingham House, North End, and Hammersmith—but I think 'twould be shorter to go by the Uxbridge Road. There is an open stretch of common up to a hamlet called North Highway. Midway between it and Brookgreen I came upon a curious tumble-down red brick house, with big stables beside it, broken fencing—windows stopped up—cut-throat sort of place—a few fir trees and stunted oaks about it ; still there was a cheerful smoke out of one of the chimneys, and some cocks and hens scratching and clucking round by the side of the house—so I pulled up and rode very slow. By the near end of the stables a man with his leg bandaged, and a big stick in his hand, was leaning against a piece of paling. I knew him in a minute ; so, keeping off a bit, I asked if I could get to Harrow that road. He said he did not know, and went on to curse the place up and down for a melancholy ghostly hole, that no one would stay in if he were not tied by the leg. After a little more talk I asked who lived there, and he said an old care-taker and his wife ; but when I asked to whom it belonged, he pulled up all

of a sudden, and says he, 'What's that to you? I've been talking too much,' and away he stumped round to the back of the place."

"This is a curious incident, D'Arcy: are you sure of your man?"

"Cock sure, Excellency! and my notion is that he has been hidden away till he is forgotten, and the broken bones you gave him are all right again. Moreover, I feel pretty sure this is the place Mistress Maud Langley was to have been taken to. You see the hunt after her would be more likely to have been along the high-road, and from Chelsea it's all cross cuts to the Scrubs, where I saw the postilion."

"I wish," said Monteiro after this long description of his discoveries by D'Arcy—"I wish we could trace the ownership of this house to John Langley; but I fear he is too shrewd not to obliterate his tracks. D'Arcy, I have much on hands to-day; look to this matter for me. Here," opening his purse and giving him some money; "don't spare the filthy necessary lucre. I must go out now. Call me a coach, old comrade."

Having watched the Countess of Helmsford's gilded equipage turn into Soho Square, Monteiro bade his driver go as fast as the condition of his cattle would permit, to St. James's; dismissing the conveyance, he knocked at the door.

"Her ladyship is not long gone out," was the porter's reply to his queries.

"Ha!" returned Monteiro, and stood a moment as if in thought. "Can I see Mr. Chifferil?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. James, summon Mr. Chifferil."

"If he is in his own room," said Monteiro, who knew it, "I will visit him there."

The footman accordingly led Monteiro across the hall, and down a passage, throwing open the door into Chifferil's office or study, whichever it may be called.

The little man seemed worn and ill, and looked up with an air of great astonishment at his visitor.

"Chifferil," cried Monteiro, his eyes sparkling with

impatience, as he threw aside his feathered hat and grasped the secretary's hand, "there are two doors to this room, whither leads that one?" pointing opposite.

"To another passage, and the common stair," said Chifferil, with increasing surprise.

"Go then," Monteiro exclaimed with vehemence, and pushing the little man by the shoulder—"go straight to Mistress Langley, tell her I await her here; bring her with you as privately as you can. Where are those cursed hags, Beville and Dorothy?"

"Mistress Beville is gone forth on an errand for my lady; of the other I know naught."

"In luck for once!" said Monteiro. "Go, man! do not lose a second."

"But, sir, good sir! Mistress Langley will not come, and I durst not, I fear—"

"Look you, Chifferil, I will give you another fear to correct the first. By Heaven! if you don't instantly obey, I'll thrust my rapier through you!" and he laid his hand on the hilt.

"Goodness preserve me! he is gone mad," said the terrified secretary, rushing to the opposite door.

"No, no, good Chifferil! Mistress Maud expects me; 'tis a matter of the last importance—go!"

And Chifferil, partly from fear, but more from complaisance, hastened upstairs to Maud's apartments.

As soon as he was gone, Monteiro carefully locked the door by which he had himself entered, and then took his stand by the table, his eyes fixed upon the opposite entrance. He had not long to wait; it opened, and his face lit up with the joy her presence brought. She was followed by Chifferil, his face blank with amazement, for Mistress Langley, so far from refusing to see the bold Spaniard, had immediately accompanied, or rather preceded him at a pace he could scarce keep up with.

"Stay without yon door!" said Monteiro peremptorily: "see that no one comes in! and keep your watch in your hand; in half an hour, sharp time, enter and tell me I must be gone." Something in his eye and tone made Chifferil obey without a word.

"Dios ! I am forced to limit my own glimpse of heaven !" he exclaimed, as the door closed on the stupefied secretary. "Now, madam ! beloved ! Maud ! speak ! I can but snatch a moment to obey you ; speak !"

But Maud, paralyzed for a moment by the suddenness and boldness of Monteiro's stratagem, could not find words ; she clasped her hands, pressing them on her heart, and gazed straight into Monteiro's eyes with a look so earnest, so imploring, that he had less difficulty in keeping his resolution to drop the lover. "Sir ! my cousin," she said at last, with an evident effort ; "the prayer I wished to urge upon you, is that I may acquaint the Countess who you are, and wherefore you took Harold's place in that ceremony. Indeed I cannot bear to live thus deceiving her from day to day ; pray, sir, release me from my promise !"

"Yes ! the deceit is odious," said Monteiro, looking down. "Yet, Maud, I tremble for *you* if the truth be known ; a little more patience, and all may with safety be told."

"But not the less will my aunt justly complain if I do not confide in her. Why—why do you fear *her* ?"

"I—" He hesitated. It was impossible to explain his reasons, even had he time. "My moments now are too few for explanation," he continued. "I can but ask you to trust me yet. Maud, dearest ! to whom I have vowed my faith, whether you accept it or not, trust me yet."

"I do, I must in much," she said. "But in this I do entreat you be guided by me ; no danger can come that will outweigh the wrong of keeping this matter from Lady Helmsford ; let me speak to her this day, when she comes in ; I utterly dread telling her ; why, I know not, yet I will—"

"Not so," returned Monteiro after a moment's thought. "The task must be mine, sweet cousin, as I may call you nothing else ; your desire shall be fulfilled. Give me two days, and the Countess shall know I am your husband."

"Rupert," she said very softly, great tears standing in

her eyes, "I believe that, besides my good Dorothy, I have no friend in the wide world save yourself; do not jest about the strange stratagem by which you preserved me from my terrible uncle and his son. I thank you for it, but do not speak of it now."

"I will not; indeed I will not," he exclaimed, touched by the simple dignity of her manner. "But as a kinsman and a friend, suffer me to put one question, and answer it. You are young, but not too young to have met some one you thought worthy your love; is it so?"

"Nay. Had I loved any other, how could I have consented to wed Harold?"

"Then," cried Monteiro unconsciously drawing nearer to her, "your heart is all your own!"

"It is indeed," returned Maud, with a smile. "To whom could I have given it?"

"I breathe once more," murmured Monteiro. "Speak to me again, sweet cousin! call me Rupert! tell me you feel I am your friend. Ay! utterly yours—in what character you will! speak to me."

"Rupert! be sure you do not make my aunt unhappy;" she looked down as she spoke.

"Her happiness is not in my keeping; I swear I never sought to be its guardian," said Monteiro emphatically. "Tell me you believe me."

"Your voice sounds truthful," she returned, with a sigh.

"Then promise you will leave this matter in my hands; do not attempt to broach it yourself."

"I promise," said Maud, raising her eyes and letting them rest on his earnestly.

"Believe me I am true," he began; then with a sudden change of manner he exclaimed: "Ah! turn away your eyes, sweet one! if you look thus, I shall forget my vows. Maud! had we met when your good father lived, and had I had time and opportunity to woo you, would you have shrunk from me as you do? Remember, fairest, dearest cousin, that for months you have been before me, day and night, as my own, my wife! Oh! pardon me—I did not mean to speak in this strain; but you surely

must feel how great, how irresistible, was the temptation to confess all, when we were alone for the first time, and the burning wish—”

“Ah! do not—do not speak such words, my friend, my cousin! I cannot describe how they disturb and alarm me; my heart beats as though it would burst, and I have so little peace!”

“Forgive me,” said Monteiro penitently, his superior experience deriving a little comfort from this confession of disturbance; “I will not again transgress.”

“And you will certainly tell my aunt?”

“Upon my honor, yes!”

“Will you inform me when it is done?”

“I imagine my lady will not lose much time in letting you know,” said Monteiro, with a smile which Maud did not find reassuring.

“Then I will say good-bye,” returned Maud. “Your promise has relieved my heart.”

“Oh, not yet! not yet!” he exclaimed. “Stay a little longer; it will be days before I can see you again. One more warning, sweetest cousin!—let nothing induce you to take action against me—against the gossamer bonds that unite us. I speak now solely in your own interest. Oh! trust me, when the right time comes you shall be free!”

“But my aunt says,” returned Maud, her composure much restored by his frankness, “that at the outset the ceremony was illegal because you must have used Harold’s name.”

“No, faith!” cried Monteiro, laughing. “My words were, ‘I, Rupert, take thee, Maud.’ The strange parson knew not what the bridegroom’s name might be, and you were too faint—Ah! I must not think of that day! But you promise this much?”

“I do, sir—cousin—you see I trust you. Strange,” continued Maud, looking at him but speaking to herself—“strange though it be, I seem to catch glimpses of my father in your look and voice—yet you are not like him!”

“Was it this fancy then kept you mute when you saw Harold was not beside you *that* day?”

"Partly ; but more because I feared they would hurt you."

"Dearest ! beloved !—I mean, dear madam—your goodness makes my heart ache. What ! must you leave me ? But, Maud, will you not be in the drawing-room to-night—to-morrow ? I can come when I like, and I can at least see you !"

"No, sir ! I will not see you again till Lady Helmsford knows—" She paused.

"That my whole soul is yours !" cried Monteiro. "This is the real confession ! That empty, distracting ceremony counts for nothing. But oh ! should John Langley, or any one molest you, will you not take courage and trust yourself to me ?"

He clasped the hand she held out in adieu, as he spoke, and covered it with passionate kisses.

"Rupert—my friend—my cousin," cried Maud, struggling to withdraw it ; "is this your promise ?"

"I know I break it," said Monteiro, still grasping her hand ; "but you must forgive ! You do not know the despair for my own future that mingles with my hope for yours. Yet I am not, I will not be, selfish or unworthy of you. There, I will not keep you against your will—go, dearest !"

"Rupert !" exclaimed Maud, much moved, "you are very, very good to me ! May God protect you !" She burst into tears, and turning quickly, opened the door, ran lightly past the wretched Chifferil, and away up to her own room.

"The half hour was not quite expired," said Chifferil, much relieved as he entered the room. He found Monteiro had thrown himself into a chair, and, resting his elbows on the table, had buried his face in his hands. "Eh, sir, I hope there is no new misfortune !—nothing fresh ?"

Monteiro did not reply at once, and first rose, stretching out his arms as if to grasp something invisible to his companion. "Another week, and all may be lost to me ! If I succeed for her, I perhaps destroy myself ; but if I fail—if through some royal crotchet she is condemned to

poverty and dependence—no power on earth shall keep her from me! Chifferil, my good friend, I was somewhat rough just now; forgive it! The strain of these last scenes in the drama we are enacting is somewhat trying."

"Indeed, sir, I was in mortal fear while I stood yonder, besides which a bitter draught from one of the lower doors caught me about the calves," rubbing the part affected. "I trust you did not offend Mistress Langley! Methought she wept as she came past me."

"Offend her! Heaven forbid! Chifferil, you shall soon hail her Baroness Langdale, and free from all claimants, with the world before her where to choose!"

"What, sir! free of that impostor who calls himself her husband?"

"Ay! even of him. Now, good-morrow, Chifferil."

"Stay, sir! I beseech you tell me what account shall I give of your visit to my mistress!"

"——!" said Monteiro to himself. "'Tis indeed time this were ended—say—" looking around, "oh, say I came in to see this morning's *Courant*, which my stupid fellow forgot to give me—here let me look." He hastily seized it. "Caramba," he exclaimed after a minute's silence, "that is good! an express from Helvoetsluys. The King and his company arrived there on Monday, and, after a day's rest, will set sail for Dover should the wind be favorable. The toils are closing round John Langley."

"Well, good day, sir. I think no eye saw Mistress Maud's descent."

"Keep counsel a short space longer, Chifferil, and hurrah for broad daylight."

So saying, Monteiro threw on his hat and left the house. He was not much behind time at the auction after all; but Lady Helmsford was concerned and annoyed to observe his gravity and preoccupation. Not all her grace and coquetry could extract compliments or repartees. 'Tis true he purchased some costly trifles, which, with kindly gravity, he begged the Countess to accept, and which, he said, would perhaps remind her of their friendship when he was far away.

The Countess was startled, but could draw no explanation from him. In a day or two at furthest he would confide his plans to her, he said. With this she was obliged to be content. Monteiro, though determined to keep his word, felt that every hour gained was so much additional security for Maud. He dreaded, with a fear he knew was prophetic, to reveal his true feelings to Lady Helmsford ; but it must be done.

Reluctantly the Countess bade him adieu when he handed her into her gilded coach, but he was again imperatively engaged ; so with a troubled, yet not altogether mortified heart, Lady Helmsford progressed homewards, whiling away some time by paying a few necessary visits.

She was depressed and weary. Had she not been engaged to a party at Leicester House, she would have remained at home : this, however, was not to be avoided.

She retired as soon as she could, and was glad to find herself at home.

"Shortly after your ladyship left," said the solemn and penitent Hobson, who, after much intercession had been permitted to continue in office—"shortly after your ladyship left, a messenger from Mr. John Langley brought this letter."

It was a large important-looking missive, sealed with the Langley coat-of-arms in black wax. Lady Helmsford smiled scornfully as she opened it and read :

"MADAM,—I have from courtesy avoided intruding upon your ladyship ; but I have kept myself informed of my ward's condition, and find I can, without offense or injury, insist upon her restoration to my custody. On the second day from this writing, I therefore give you notice, I shall personally remove her from your residence to my own. I trust you are sufficiently familiar with the law, as it affects guardian and ward, to cause no let or hindrance to this exercise of my right.

"I have the honor to be, Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"JOHN LANGLEY."

"Is Chifferil up?" asked Lady Helmsford when she had read this epistle.

"No, my lady; he has been a-bed some time. He is troubled with an aching head."

"What another!" said Lady Helmsford. "If that tiresome man is going to have his brain confused with unaccountable headaches, he had better quit my service. Tell him as soon as he wakes in the morning that I wish Master Hervey the lawyer brought to me—early—mind you, Hobson."

So saying, Lady Helmsford ascended to her room and Beville.

"Don Juan di Monteiro was here to-day, my lady," said that astute waiting-woman.

"I know," said the Countess absently.

"He paid a visit to Mr. Chifferil."

"Yes, I know!" repeated her mistress; and for a few moments she was reduced to the silent brushing and plaiting of her mistress's dark tresses.

"Beville," exclaimed Lady Helmsford, speaking out of her thoughts, "John Langley writes formally to reclaim his ward; but I shall not let her go."

"Indeed, my lady! She was somewhat indisposed to-day—faint-like, a bad headache and tears."

"So much the better," said the Countess carelessly; "then she cannot be taken out of my house. I will call in two or three doctors to-morrow!" A pause ensued.

"Beville, give me a posset—something that will induce sleep."

"La, madam! is not your ladyship well?"

"Well enough; but oppressed. I do not seem quite to understand what is going on around me—that attempt to carry off my niece now! What a mystery! But for that queer, stiff old soldier, it would have been done."

"Just so, my lady. He is a mystery himself; the last sort of man I should take for a stockbroker."

"A stockbroker," said Lady Helmsford yawning; "he is nothing of the kind. What put that into your head?"

"Because Mistress Sparrow said he was."

"Mistress Sparrow!" cried the Countess, now fully

waking up. "What does she know of him? You have something to tell—tell it!"

"Well, my lady, about a fortnight ago, you and Mistress Langley were away at my Lord Chedworth's, Mistress Sparrow invited Master Chifferil and Mistress Dorothy to tea, not mentioning me in any way, because, I suppose, she thinks my room better than my company—not that I care—your ladyship's favor leaves me nothing to wish for; but, coming up the stair in the evening, I met Master Chifferil conducting this very Master D'Arcy into his study. So I just said to Mistress Sparrow next morning, 'You had strange company last night, ma'am;' and she says, 'Mistress Beville, a very genteel man from Change Alley, called to see Master Chifferil about shares—his stock-broker in short!' Now, I happened to be in the passage the morning your ladyship rewarded him for his valor as he was turning into the same apartment, and knew him at once."

"This is passing strange, Beville," said Lady Helmsford; and she sat in silent thought for some minutes. "Say no more of this to any one save myself," she resumed. "I must question Chifferil."

"Your ladyship will not mention me in the matter?"

"Oh, rest easy on that score! Now 'tis evident Monteiro holds communication with Chifferil; but wherefore? Shall I ask Chifferil? Go!" interrupting herself; "go, Beville, I need no more; leave me."

"Shall I ask Chifferil?" she said half aloud as she moved restlessly to and fro. "No; I will seek Juan's confidence first. If he loves me—if he will be true—no shadow of distrust shall arise on my part. He will come probably to-morrow; and I will open my heart and show him all the wealth I am ready to bestow upon him—even all that God has given me of beauty and riches, and tenderness and devotion. It is a grand dowry! yet I doubt——"

CHAPTER XXI.

EVENING was closing in on the day after the events last recorded. John Langley had returned from his daily avocations, and finished his frugal dinner he had eaten alone. Harold, never very fond of his father's society, had taken advantage of his character of an invalid to have his irregular but tolerably frequent meals and potations served upstairs. It had been a most trying period to him, this incarceration in his father's gloomy, respectable abode. But Langley was resolute; he knew what the consequences would be if he left him free and unwatched in his bachelor lodgings, so Harold was obliged to submit to his fate, which was always his destiny whenever his father chose seriously to oppose him. How heartily he cursed his hard fate, the crotchets of his sire, the obstinacy and bad taste of his intended bride, the meddling of the insolent stranger, for it was of course now well known who had rescued Maud—all can be imagined, but even this mental exercise was but poor pastime, and to show himself with a broken arm was too dangerous an experiment. He therefore bore his imprisonment as best he might, to the diminution of Mr. Langley's stock of Hollands and Burgundy.

With his accustomed methodical habit, John Langley turned to his accounts after dinner, and having made sundry entries and calculations, put away his books and ascended to his son's room. He found the interesting invalid looking very pallid, disheveled, and unkempt. Harold was one of those who, wanting in innate self-respect, only care to dress for company. He was seated by the fire, a table with a bottle and glass upon it beside him, and a dice-box in his hand.

"Good-evening to you," said Mr. Langley, drawing a chair opposite his son, and laying a letter he held on the table. "What are you doing, Harold?"

"Just throwing a main, sir, right hand against left, though the right has to trust his adversary with the bones."

"Um ! I like not the pastime ! How is your arm, boy ?"

"So-so—a little stronger, I think ; I hunger for the time when it will be able to pay my debts to that meddling foreign adventurer."

"He stands well with the Countess of Helmsford."

"Ay, sir, she is mad about him ; I should not wonder if she forgot herself so far as to take him for a husband, as well as a lover."

"If that be so he is no rival of *yours* ?"

"Of mine ? No ; it's not like he would turn from a wealthy full-blown beauty to a little beggarly white-faced chit—"

"Stay, Harold ; I find people begin to speak of her as the possible heiress of Langdale ! Lady Helmsford does not hesitate to say so ; Craggs spoke to me only to-day to the same effect—"

"Ha !" interrupted Harold, "that's serious ! Was there ever such infernal ill-luck as my being trapped at Langdale ? Still, this Monteiro acted in the matter of the rescue as the devoted servant of Lady Helmsford ; that is his line."

"Perhaps so, and so far 'tis better ! You know I applied formally to that insolent woman for the restoration of my ward ; here is her reply, most artfully worded : ' Dear Sir,—mark that ! It is little more than ten days since, with scorn, she drove me from her house, ordering her lackeys, in my hearing, never to admit me again. Now I am ' Dear Sir,—I have your letter of yesterday's date. I do not pretend to oppose your just claim to the custody of your ward ; she should be ready to accompany you to-morrow, so far as I am concerned, but she is in truth seriously indisposed and ill at ease. The physicians whom I have called in to see her can testify to the truth of this statement—she is unable to leave her chamber. In a few days she will doubtless be better able to bear the transit, and I shall be happy to restore her to your care. Indeed, I think of returning for a season to Paris, in which case I should of course

be guided by your will in the disposal of Mistress Langley.

“ ‘I have the honor to be, sir,

“ ‘Yours faithfully,

“ ‘E. HELMSFORD.’ ”

John Langley read every word of this letter down to the signature in a dry bitter tone, and then stopping, looked at his son.

“Well, sir,” said the young man, reaching over to the wine and filling his glass, “it is very fair and civil. Women like coddling each other when they are sick ; we will have her here next week, and quite time enough, in my opinion.”

“Do not drink more,” returned Langley, pushing the bottle away ; “it seems to me you have already had too much. So—the letter pleases you ! it does not me. The Helmsford woman did not compose that herself ; it must have cost her scornful heart somewhat even to pen the lines ; there’s some shrewd adviser pulling the wires. Moreover, it is an object to gain a few days, and she has gained them. I would destroy my own character as a kind and fatherly protector, were I to drag a sick girl from the care of her own aunt.”

“Ay, sir, but the girl may be ill ; you see she offers the witness of the physicians.”

“Bah !” returned Langley with a scoff, “worth so much per word ! No, Harold, I will fight her with her own weapons ; I will courteously assent to the delay and request permission for my *own* doctor, in whom I have great confidence, to visit her ; trust me, he shall soon declare her fit to travel !”

“Zounds, sir !” cried Harold, laughing, “I’ll back you against my lady ; I suppose you have a trusty medical attendant ?”

“Two or three, my son—two or three,” returned John Langley meditatively. “Next week at furthest she must be in our hands. I will speak her fair, assure her I will *not* press the marriage upon her, then you must do the rest.”

"What part have you chalked out for me then?"

"The desperate disappointed lover; and this time there shall be no failure!"

"So it was to be last time."

"I have a better plan now. Moreover, though I care not to appear, I shall see to the execution of it myself. Listen, Harold! as soon as I have my ward safe I will soothe her; she shall be advised to try change for the recovery of her shattered nerves, and I will offer her a tranquil retreat at Langdale; pledge my honor that you shall not go there, but refuse to promise that you may not molest her here; she shall start *without* me, mind, under the care of Mathews and the doctor and some woman. I will never let that vile witch Dorothy inside my house again! Then on the road (not too far), you, urged by despair, finding your own father against you, attack the party and carry the prize to the place before prepared; there we can provide a priest as well as a doctor, let the ceremony be performed, after which you can be guided by your own judgment; keep her a close prisoner for a week—ten days—more—till I—getting alarmed at not having news of her safe arrival at Langdale, also at the disappearance of my son—make search and find both! By that time the haughty Mistress Maud will not refuse to acknowledge you as her husband. Her reputation will be at your mercy, and all the chances are in your favor; besides which, away in that lonely place there are numerous means at your disposal—"

"Why, 'tis a far finer plot than t'other!" interrupted Harold; "only I wish you would give me the wine or some Hollands; they steady a fellow's nerves, and keeping indoors makes me vaporish. Zounds! I wish my cranky cousin would give us less trouble! only just fancy, if those pirates at Langdale had not nabbed me we'd have been a steady loving couple of three or four months' date!" and Harold shivered a little.

"Your courage does not fail you, boy?" asked Langley harshly. "Remember, I recommend no violence beyond anything your own impulse might suggest; but once she is your wife, I am certain all difficulty respect-

ing a reversal of the attainder would vanish. You would be illustrious as a daring gallant ! and think of the wealth, the position, the rank, for with my interest I think I could get it extended to yourself ! Come, Harold, 'tis a fair prospect worth a few hours' discomfort and a bold struggle !”

“No doubt, sir ! I should be a poltroon to shrink from it !”

“Now I think 'twould be well to employ Morley in organizing the attempt,” resumed Langley ; “he is the safest, he does not know *me*, and I have his neck in a noose ; he is stowed away safely now, but the ardor of the hunt for him is a little lulled. What an ill chance it was, his pitching on that treacherous dog—that man D'Arcy !”

“Yes,” said Harold, grinding his teeth ; “I should like to pay him back. And the place itself,” he continued, “I suppose 'tis still in a state of preparation ?”

“I'll see to it. Morley shall manage that, but he must keep out of sight. My Lord Chedworth's people have been to Lamb's and Hatton Garden, and all his haunts, seeking him. That ruffian D'Arcy told all he knew—'twas well he knew so little.”

After some more discussion of detail, John Langley bade his son good-night, promising that he should go forth in a coach, with strictest privacy, next day, and, after driving to some distant point, alight and walk a while, determining in his own mind that this expedition should be undertaken only under the guidance and guardianship of the trusty Mathews.

So descending to his study, John Langley penned a brief but reasonable and courteous reply to Lady Helmsford, made a few memoranda which none could understand save himself, and then retired calmly to rest, all preliminaries for his diabolical scheme having been settled in his own mind, and slept the sleep of the just.

Meanwhile the innocent object of these projects against her life's happiness, Maud Langley, gladly agreed with *Lady Helmsford* in the necessity for keeping her room. A couple of fashionable doctors visited her, felt her pulse,

inspected her tongue, and declared Lady Helmsford's suspicion that her niece was on the verge of a brain fever was singularly correct, ordered extreme quiet, nourishing diet, and sundry large bottles of physic, which Dorothy, with many grimaces expressive of disgust and contempt, emptied into the nearest sink.

But Maud's nervous system was greatly agitated. The impending avowal promised by Monteiro to Lady Helmsford was as a sword suspended over her head. She dreaded it unspeakably, yet could not rest till it was accomplished. Moreover, whenever Monteiro's words and looks and tones recurred to her, which was very often indeed, her heart beat too fast for comfort; but insensibly she turned to him as the one true friend she possessed—the only one of all those she knew who was connected with her dear dead father. If she could only feel certain that he had not trifled with her aunt! When she heard his voice she believed him utterly, but when alone doubts would spring up. And Dorothy, too, was a source of tender disturbance. She longed so much to lay her head against that good soul's shoulder, and tell her all. It seemed such disloyalty to their friendship to conceal anything—and such a thing! This sort of self-accusation gave peculiar tenderness to her manner and quite frightened her attached attendant.

"Don't tell me it is just a bit of nervousness and upset," she said to Mistress Sparrow; "the darlint is downright ill. She always was a sweet lamb; but, holy Mary!—I mean, the dear knows—she is like a crature too good to live jist now! It's all that John Langley. Ah, I wish I had my wicked will of you for one week, Langley! You wouldn't do much mischief at the end of it."

If the truth were known, the Countess of Helmsford was quite as much in need of calmants as her niece. Two whole days had passed, and save for an hour in a comparative crowd at Mistress Ferrar's supper-party, she had not seen Monteiro. He had only called once, and then she was out. The strain was more than she could endure—more, at any rate, than she would. She was a brave

woman, nor quite inexperienced in wearing a mask and venturing herself in a hired chair.

Her chariot was therefore ordered at a somewhat early hour one morning ; and, after depositing her at her dressmaker's, it was dismissed. Her ladyship expected Mistress Ferrars would meet her there, and she would probably return to dine with that lady.

A little later Monteiro, who had not yet gone out, was looking over some letters which he had written, to have in readiness for the frequent opportunities to be met with at "Lamb's" for sending letters abroad, when Victor entered, with a mysterious air and a suppressed smile, to inform his master that a lady was waiting without to see him.

"A lady !" exclaimed Monteiro, a sudden hope thrilling his veins. "What lady ? not the lady we rescued ?"

"No, *pardieu* ! A lady twice her size."

"Show her in," said Monteiro, with some reluctance.

In another moment the door again opened to admit a tall woman wrapped in a long cloak, a hood on her head, and a mask on her face. She stood quite still till the door was closed behind her, and then removing the mask, showed Monteiro, as he expected, the features of Lady Helmsford.

"What pleasant freak has brought you here, *ma belle* ?" cried Monteiro kindly and frankly, as he took her hand and led her to a seat ; "no new troubles, I hope ! Take off your cumbrous cloak and tell me everything. No fresh attempt on the part of John Langley ?"

"No," returned Lady Helmsford, who seemed strangely confused for so self-possessed a lady. "No ; he will, I think, keep quiet for a while. It was to speak about yourself, Juan, that I came here."

"About me, madam ?"

"Yes ; do not interrupt me ! It is so hard to have a word in private with you—the fates never favor us now as they used—so I have taken courage, Juan, and come to you."

"Why courage? You know you are welcome and respected."

"Ah, I am not so sure! But, Juan, you have looked careworn of late, you have confessed to heavy losses, you have hinted at leaving England, and I cannot bear it any longer. If you are in difficulties, let me, out of my abundance, gratify myself by sweeping them away. If you prefer life in England, can I not help towards the accomplishment of your wishes? Ah, Juan, I would do much for you!—you know I would!" Lady Helmsford's voice trembled, and nothing save the thought of her rouge would have enabled her to restrain her tears.

"Kind, generous friend," cried Monteiro, drawing a seat beside her and taking her hand in both his own, "your imagination has misled you. I have not lost at play; I am not in difficulties."

"Then what—what is the secret of the change in you? You *know* how changed you are since first we met! Why do you strive to misunderstand all that I would covertly express, until I am compelled to say—'Juan, I faint, I die for your love!' No, no! Let me speak," for he tried to stop her. "I am tortured with doubts. See, Juan, the Countess of Helmsford's husband would have a—"

"Dear lady, I must not, will not hear you! I will tell you the secret of my preoccupation, and explain *why* I am so situated—I am secretly married."

"Married!" echoed the Countess, growing pale in spite of her rouge. "Juan, why did you not tell me sooner?"

"Because I was most entangled and hedged in with difficulty."

"Tell me!" cried Lady Helmsford, her bosom heaving with the strong emotion that rent her heart; "is it a marriage you would fain break—that is distasteful?" and she grasped his hand tightly.

"No, by heaven!" he exclaimed. "If I were but sure that the lady—my wife——" he hesitated.

"Ah!" cried Lady Helmsford, starting to her feet and recoiling from him. "Speak the truth, were it to strike

me dead ! A sudden light seems to break upon me. Are you Maud Langley's husband ? ”

“ I am,” returned Monteiro.

Lady Helmsford raised her arms with a sudden despairing gesture. “ And you have deceived me ! Traitors ! both you—and she whom I protected and cherished ; preserving her from John Langley and his son for *you*, to destroy myself ! Well, sir, they shall have her now, if it was to tear her limb from limb ! ” And with hasty trembling hands the Countess strove to put on her cloak.

“ They shall not,” said Monteiro firmly, placing himself between her and the door ; “ nor shall you go hence in such a mood.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Lady Helmsford, “ does it gratify your self-conceit to see my humiliation ? ”

“ You shall not apply such words to yourself in my hearing,” he returned, taking her hands and forcing her gently to resume her seat. “ In justice to me you must hear what I have to say. I dare not flatter myself that the kindness you have ever shown me, and which you yourself mistake for a warmer feeling, has really deepened into the seriousness you represent. It is just one of your many whims.” He smiled as he spoke.

“ As if I did not know,” murmured the Countess, soothed by his touch, while bitter, burning tears forced themselves from the darkness of her despairing eyes unnoticed by her.

“ You know,” he went on rapidly, still holding one hand in a precautionary grasp, “ when I met you in Paris I was charmed and fascinated—as most are who come within the range of your influence. I little dreamed then that you were in any way connected with the Langleys—to which family my former beloved chief, Rupert, belonged. I had promised him in his dying moments to befriend Lord Langdale and his child as far as lay in my power. It was the sudden intelligence that a free pardon existed, that John Langley was about to wed the heiress to his son, which roused me to resist the spell you had *cast over me*. Besides, dear lady, you remember, or *perhaps* you do not, that you gave me scant encouragement

in Paris—that others seemed preferred before me.” Lady Helmsford certainly could not remember; but she sat silently listening, her hand in Monteiro’s, her bosom heaving, watching to gather some glimpse of hope from his words. “Such was my feeling when I hurriedly, yet reluctantly, quitted Paris,” he continued, and proceeded rapidly to sketch the events already recapitulated. “It was in a spirit of mischievous adventure,” he concluded, “that I planned the capture and personation of Harold Langley. I never intended to hold Mistress Langley to the species of provisional marriage into which, for her own sake, I was obliged to entrap her. But, dear friend, when I saw this tender, slender girl, helpless in the hands of these cold, cruel, brutal men, a new spirit entered into me—I swore to save her from them!”

The Countess drew her hand from him, shivering with the agony that shot through her, at the indescribable feeling his voice betrayed when he spoke of Maud.

“I returned to London,” he went on, “and made arrangements to give up the last ship remaining to me; then I learned your relationship to Mistress Langley, and, I confess, I could not resist the temptation of gazing at the fair girl who was my wife; but, on my honor, I had most firmly resolved never to let her or any one know the strange tie between us till she was safe and free.”

“Then she does not know?” cried Lady Helmsford, giving him her hand once more.

“She does, madam! One unguarded moment betrayed my secret; and since I have been tortured by the sense of duplicity towards you. When I found the King, and the friend on whose interest I counted, were both absent, I had nothing for it but patience and watchfulness. I confess,” continued Monteiro, a little reluctantly, for instinct told him he must not confide too entirely in his dear friend, “I had sure traces of the pardon; and I hoped—I do hope when the whole matter is laid before his Majesty, Maud will be placed under proper protection, and freed from all interference from John Langley. This is my tale. I had never meant that Mistress Langley should guess I had stood in the place of her bridegroom.”

but that night, when I saved her, when she was here, alone in her fear and distress, I could *not* keep back the words! I claimed the right to comfort and protect her."

A low moan of anguish broke from his hearer. "You were alone; and she admitted the claim?"

"No, madam!" cried Monteiro, his cheek reddening; "she shrank from me with such terror as proved to me I hardly knew how to touch a nature so delicate, and made me curse my own impetuosity. Then I prayed her to keep the matter secret, promising that I would never urge any claim upon her! She implored me to reveal all to you, and only yielded to my entreaties to withhold the knowledge. I thought a few days would end the mystery."

"And you doubted me," interrupted the Countess, "because you knew I loved you! Better have trusted my generosity than have made a tool of me, Juan, as you have done."

"Nay, dear lady, it is not so."

"It is!" cried Lady Helmsford, breaking from him and pacing the room. "You thought to provide a safe asylum for your wife in the house of the woman you were betraying, till such time as it suited you to throw off the mask and show the world how delicately you had fooled me. But beware, Juan, lest by your subtlety you have not made more danger than you have avoided! Tell me truly, how do matters stand betwixt you!"

"Ill for me, madam, Mistress Maud will not hear me; and fears me a little less only than Harold Langley himself."

"Will not hear you! When have you a chance to speak?"

"Whenever I can make a chance," exclaimed Monteiro, infinitely relieved that the terrible confession was over.

"Treachery all round! You are justly punished if she does not hear you! and yet she is most ungrateful, *Juan*, to you who have braved so much for her. Ah! *Monteiro*, contrast this coldness with the love I offer!

No sickly terrors hold me back from the honest avowal of an affection I would glory in were it returned !”

Monteiro, with an inexpressible sense of degradation and discomfort, averted his eyes, lest they might betray the feeling with which he listened to this comparison of his proud, delicate Maud, with the passionate woman—the heroine, if not much belied, of more than one bold intrigue—who was now humbling herself in the dust before him.

“Her inheritance, too,” said the Countess, coming back to her chair, “even if she gains it, is not so great. No doubt some thought of this has somewhat guided you ! And should she gain it, think you the powers that be would let her wed an alien ? Then you say she does not love you ! Oh, Juan ! what a reality you cast aside for the baseless fabric of a dream !” The unhappy woman, leaning her arms on the table, did not attempt to conceal or suppress her sobs.

Monteiro, infinitely distressed and wishing her at Jericho, did all he dared to console and soothe her.

“Tell me,” she exclaimed suddenly, “if this fractious girl continues to reject you after you have won her heritage for her, what shall you do ?”

“I know not,” he answered sadly. “I shall then have touched the outside edge of my present world.”

“Ah ! Monteiro, are you thus infatuated ?”

“I cannot account for or control my feelings, dear madam,” he cried. “Let me beseech you—be your own noble, generous self. Forgive the error I have been betrayed into by most difficult circumstances. Let me be your true admiring friend—you will soon forget you cared for anything beyond. Continue to protect and cherish my——” he stopped and substituted the words “your niece, at any rate till she is free to make a decision. She loves you and is grateful to you ; and she is so young and tender—so innocent of any willful offense against you—you cannot but love her. Oh, if you will, my utmost devotion, after what I owe my wife, is yours.”

“You are an eloquent but not a judicious pleader, Juan,” said the Countess scornfully. Then, after a mo-

ment's silence and intense rapid thought, in which she reviewed her chances, she went on, "You had better have trusted my generosity from the first."

"I ought, dear Countess, for I am sure your nature is noble."

"Well, well," she replied, turning a little from his gaze, "trust me now. I will deal gently with you—my fanciful niece—and—let me go. I want to recover myself—to be alone. You will come soon, Juan; you will want to see your wife?"—bitterly.

"No, madam; she does not want to see me."

The Countess slowly rose, looking earnestly, passionately at him out of her great dark eyes. "Give me my cloak; let your man call a chair."

"And you will permit me to accompany you home?" said Monteiro anxiously, as he wrapped her mantle round her. Her sudden stillness alarmed him.

"No, my friend—my nephew! I prefer to be alone." She stood silent and motionless for the few moments that intervened before the chair was announced. "Farewell, Juan, perhaps a long farewell. Oh, Juan!" With a sudden impulse she threw her arms around him, resting her head against his shoulder.

It was horribly embarrassing. As a gallant gentleman he could not reject a lady's embrace; but, though holding her kindly for a moment, he was not in the least tempted to touch the beautiful rich lips that lay so near his own. Availing himself of her slight movement away, he drew her arm through his own and conducted her to her chair.

"No; not to St. James's Square," said Lady Helmsford in a low choking voice; "to Madame Hortense, J—— Street."

"May I not come with you?"

"No, no; a thousand times no!"

"Victor, follow me," said Monteiro as he passed his valet after the Countess was fairly gone; and he ascended the stairs rapidly.

To seize his writing-materials, and dash off a few hurried lines was his first movement on reaching his room.

These he folded, directed, and inclosed in another letter containing a line, and which he directed to Mr. Chifferil.

"Here, Victor," he exclaimed, "take this to Lady Helmsford's house—you are not known there—ask for Chifferil; give this into his hand, and return. Speak to none, save to ask for him."

"*Bien, Monsieur!*" said Victor, taking the billet, and departing.

The iron had indeed entered the Countess of Helmsford's soul during the interview just recorded. All the dim forebodings she had scouted as diseased impossible imaginings had been suddenly and hideously realized. Her dreams—the brightest and best she had known perhaps in all her prosperous life—were shattered into a chaotic mass of stinging agony. How was it possible that slight, pallid, insignificant girl could rival *her*—grand and beautiful as she was? but worse than all—than even the sense of having humiliated herself in vain—was the sense of having been made use of by the man she loved, as a convenient protectress for his wife. If it had been *only* a wife, indeed, she would not have so much resented his action; but not all Monteiro's tact and care could hide from her his passionate affection for this proud, shy, cold maiden, who shrank from his love, and trembled at the possibility of his claims.

But if it were so indeed; if Maud was willing and ready to resign him; if it were possible that Juan di Monteiro had neither touched her heart nor her fancy, there was hope yet for herself. Could she persuade Maud to avow her intention to break the marriage, when she had reaped all the benefit she could from it, might not Monteiro's heart yet be caught in the recoil? The game was not quite played out. If Maud was all Monteiro represented her to be, a chance was still left; and Lady Helmsford was not the woman to lose it.

Somewhat calmed by the force of this resolution, the Countess, fearing to meet Maud, compelled herself to dress and take up the iron yoke of social observance. In society she must control herself, and with the exercise of

self-control more power would come. She was unusually brilliant and charming ; even Lord Chedworth said that had he not been already captivated by the niece, he would have fallen a victim to the aunt.

When at last, thoroughly worn out by the excitement of the day, Lady Helmsford retired to rest, her last order was :

"Tell Chifferil I shall want him in my study to-morrow, early—remember early !"

CHAPTER XXII.

BY no word or sign did Lady Helmsford betray to her favorite attendant the conflict through which she had passed, or the vague schemes of resistance and revenge that were forming themselves in her brain. She was still and silent from the effects of exhaustion. The only peculiarity which attracted Beville's notice was her mistress's extreme quiet the preceding night and her activity in the morning. Her bell was rung a full hour before her usual time, but she was thoughtful and preoccupied ; the only words she spoke during the progress of her toilet were to ask Beville how she would like to visit Paris again.

"Rarely, my lady !" replied the waiting-woman, who was very proud of being in the train of a lady who thought little of what was then a most wonderful undertaking, *i. e.*, a journey to Paris.

"Well, I may go there sooner than you expect. Now, Beville, go to Mistress Langley so soon as you think she is dressed, tell her with—*with my love*, that I hope she rested well, that I fear I cannot see her to-day, that I have no further tidings of Mr. Langley." Lady Helmsford rose as she spoke and walked slowly into her study or boudoir. Chifferil had not yet made his appearance, and the Countess sat down at her writing-table, musing to herself, "No, I must not see her yet ! *put matters in train first*," took pen and paper, and *some time in deep thought without using either his*

Whatever the success of the plan she was striving to mature, a visit to Paris was the best sort of retreat she could secure. If Maud, yielding to her aunt's suggestion, wrote to claim Monteiro's promise to set her free, declaring her own determination not to confirm the ceremony through which they had gone—good! Lady Helmsford would then really rouse herself and set to work in earnest to deliver her from Langley—would protect and provide for her! Then to the Countess would be the gracious task of consoling Monteiro, and obliterating from his mind all thought of the insipid child he chose to call his wife! Even then Paris would be a safer scene of reparation and reconciliation than London. If Maud was so base and treacherous as to hold Monteiro to his vows, and her own—but no! Lady Helmsford had not the courage just then to face this alternative, still less to let the desperate cruel purpose, she knew was exhaling from the volcano of her heart, form itself visibly before her mental vision. No, at this stage of thought she shrunk somewhat from that of which, under certain conditions, she knew she was capable. If, however, her best hopes were fulfilled, it was of the last importance that Monteiro's marriage with Maud should be kept a profound secret. It would be a delightful morsel of scandal for gossip, her espousals with a man who had already gone through were it merely the wedding ceremony with her niece! Yes—to Paris she would go. At last she dipped her pen in the ink, and wrote slowly and carefully for a while. She had already folded and directed the letter, when Chifferil entered with an air of haste and some confusion.

"Pardon me, my lady, I had no idea you would be so early!"

"I *said* early!" replied the Countess sharply. "But no excuses—let me see your accounts." For more than half-an-hour did this woman, so lately overwhelmed and blinded by her passionate infatuation for Monteiro, look narrowly into her affairs, asking sudden questions, and acquainting herself with all details since her last recent examination; she paused at length. "You are a good accountant, Chifferil, and a useful servant," she said; "I

am about to show my confidence in you, but first tell me how you came to know Don Monteiro so well." She spoke with a careless assurance of the fact, which overthrew the small degree of self-possession possessed by Chifferil. He was fearfully embarrassed. What did she or did she not know? How much ought he to tell her? had Don Monteiro revealed the fact of his devotion to Lord Langdale's daughter, which even Chifferil began to suspect was more than obedience to the wishes of his defunct commander, or revenge on John Langley?

"Don Monteiro—madam—my lady," he hesitated.

"Is your head still confused," she asked scornfully, "that you cannot understand so simple a question? How came you to know the Don so well?"

"I do not know him so very well, madam. I—your remember I met the gentleman in Paris, with your ladyship, and he was good enough to converse with me at times—"

"Yes, yes," cried Lady Helmsford; "but when did you enter into a league together touching Mistress Langley?" The Countess in thus speaking fired a bold random shot.

"Mistress Maud Langley! your ladyship—I—a—"

"Come, man! speak truly; don't go into a fit, striving to frame improbable lies! Do you think I shall be angry with you for helping Don Monteiro to befriend my niece? only you might both have trusted *me* more!"

"Indeed, madam," cried Chifferil, somewhat reassured both by her tone and words, "I was most ready to do my utmost for the young lady! You see I was not unknown to the late lord, I was indeed under deep obligations to him; but knowing, that is hearing, that no very great friendship existed between your ladyship and—"

"In short," she interrupted him, "that Langdale and I hated each other as only near connections do—go on, Chifferil."

"I did not think necessary to acquaint your ladyship."

"When did you learn that Monteiro was also interested in Lord Langdale!"

"I see your ladyship knows all ! Has the Don told you ?"

"He has—be quick !—speak !"

"Well then, madam, hearing that my lord was sick and ill, I ventured, when in Paris, to find his lodgings and ask after him. After he had breathed his last, I met Don Juan, bound on the same errand as myself ; we then spoke together, and I promised to let him know what I found out respecting the young orphan ; he made the same promise to me. I took occasion afterwards to mention the—the enmity that existed between my lord and your ladyship."

"Indeed !" cried Lady Helmsford. "This may in a measure account—" then interrupting herself: "What did he tell you of the strange wedding ?"

"Nothing, madam, save that he was very fearful the impostor, whoever he might be, should molest the young lady. He knows no more of it than we do !"

"Ha ! you think so !" said the Countess, giving him a piercing look. She was silent for a few seconds.

Chifferil then knew nothing of this detestable unfortunate marriage, that was good so far. In fact Chifferil knew very little ; still, he was too much of a partisan for Maud to be permitted access to either her or that maddening, fascinating Juan.

"Enough about Mistress Maud and her affairs," said Lady Helmsford, rousing herself from her thoughts. "Attend to the commission I am about to give you ; I said I would prove my appreciation of your services. I have for some time been dissatisfied with Hawkshaw, my agent at Helmsford ; he seems to have been reducing rents and felling trees somewhat recklessly. I want you to go down suddenly, without previous warning, examine his accounts, see to the condition of house and land and tenants, see also if it might not be made a suitable residence for my niece should she wish to retire there, make yourself acquainted with everything and report to me. Here," handing him the letter she had just finished, "here is your authority ; see you start to-morrow morning ; send to-night and secure your place in the stage

coach. I will write a check for your expenses and a quarter's salary in advance, which shall be in addition to your usual pay. You may leave me now, for you have, no doubt, preparations to make."

"But, my lady!" cried the wretched Chifferil, to whom a journey into Yorkshire was a labor of Hercules, and to whose imagination the dangers of the north road arrayed themselves in awful magnitude, "this is indeed sudden and unexpected; moreover 'tis a toilsome journey, I—"

"Do you hesitate?" cried my lady. "If you are too dainty and fearful to carry out my instructions readily and with energy, quit my service! I cannot be impeded by drones. Are you willing to start to-morrow or not?"

"Of course, madam, I am," said Chifferil despairingly, for he had no idea of resigning his excellent appointment.

"Very well; leave me now, I shall see you again this evening."

Soon after, her ladyship's carriage was ordered, and she proceeded to execute a large amount of business; she visited my Lord Sunderland at the Treasury, her stock-broker in Change Alley, her lawyer in Gray's Inn, besides sundry shops and various fine ladies.

As she drove homewards down Pall Mall, she espied the chariot of Lord Chedworth, who, with courteous gesticulations, motioned to her coachman to stop, then descended and addressed her ladyship through the carriage window, hat in hand.

"I am but now returned lamenting from your ladyship's mansion. The fair châtelaine was abroad, the gentle Mistress Maud indisposed and invisible! Permit me, madam, to entreat you will alight, and honor me by taking a turn on the Mall. 'Tis beauteous weather, and the *beau monde* is all assembled. Suffer me to present my arm."

"Thank you, my lord, I will accept your obliging offer," returned Lady Helmsford, and disengaging her hoop she contrived to squeeze it through the door less *ungracefully* than most women.

The carriages had met near Spring Gardens, and Lord

Chedworth conducted her ladyship with elaborate politeness into the park. It was a beautiful day, more like April than the end of February, and the fashionable promenade was crowded. Hoop met hoop, and gallants entangled their rapiers in draperies. Many and varied were the gorgeous costumes and rich braveries of both men and women. Lady Helmsford was well employed acknowledging this acquaintance, and bowing to that, yet did her large eager eyes not fail to seek for one well-known figure, yet in vain. She had thought it not unlikely that Don Juan might have been among the fashionable crowd when she accepted Lord Chedworth's invitation to walk; but he was nowhere to be seen. Next a jealous pang shot through her; was it possible that while she was searching for him in the crowd he had taken advantage of her absence, and was perhaps even now pleading his cause with Maud—and not in vain? Lady Helmsford could *not* imagine Monteiro pleading in vain; but she *could* imagine, with maddening distinctness, how such a man as Juan would avail himself of the curious link that existed between him and the woman he sought. These ideas made her feverish, and very inattentive to her companion's polite conversation; at length, just as she was about to say she would leave the Mall, her intention was arrested by the mention of Maud.

"I regret to find sweet Mistress Langley is not so well! Methought she seemed wonderfully restored when I had the pleasure of seeing her the other evening. Ah, madam! I fear me your friendship is scarce so staunch as I had hoped, or you would have granted me ere this opportunity to plead my suit personally to your fair niece. Certes, her position is painful, and I so far agree with her ignoble guardian, that the best way to neutralize the fictitious marriage, is by substituting a real one. I think if I could represent to the young lady the ease, security, and affection her marriage with myself would insure, she might be induced to overlook the disparity of our years and my small merit!"

"My dear lord!" cried Lady Helmsford, "she would be a most fortunate woman were she to become your

wife ! You know you have my best wishes ! let me think ; you shall have the opportunity you wish for to-morrow or next day. John Langley threatens to remove her from me, and a more favorable moment could not be found. I do think the poor child likes you well, but she has been so grievously tormented she has scarce a chance of knowing what she really does like. To-morrow, or if I find it more advisable, the next day, I will send you a little note appointing an hour when you shall see Maud alone, nor do I doubt so skilled a gallant as Lord Chedworth will know how to make his suit acceptable."

She smiled encouragingly on the gallant old nobleman, thinking the while, "If I can pique or coerce Maud into wedding him, my game is half won."

"Good-day, dear Lady Helmsford !" cried Mistress Ferrars, stopping them. "Why, it is a marvel to see you among the herd of ordinary mortals in the Mall ! you seldom deign to honor the promenade ! My Lord Chedworth, how goes on your search ? Have you tracked the villains who sought to carry off Mistress Langley, yet ?"

The pretty Mistress Ferrars was accompanied by Sir Eustace Blount and a following of other beaux, suitable to her standing as a belle.

"Alas !" said Lord Chedworth, "I have had but scant success, a poor postilion and a stable-man are all we have lit upon. The larger game have escaped."

After a little desultory conversation and remarks on the news of the day, Sir Eustace observed :

"His Majesty has been wondrously favored by winds and tides. He landed last evening at Dover."

"Last night ! what fairy has told you ?" cried Lady Helmsford. "Why, 'tis scarce five o'clock now !"

"It is a fact, nevertheless," returned Sir Eustace conceitedly ; "though not yet generally known. I happened to pass the Treasury not twenty minutes ago, and met Craggs ; we stopped to speak, while so doing, up came a horseman, disordered by hard riding. 'Ha !' says Craggs, 'an express from Dover ! I fancy the King is landed.' *He left me ; I made inquiry and was told the conjecture was true.*"

"Then he will be here on Wednesday at furthest," said Lord Chedworth.

"Oh, sooner! I say Tuesday!" exclaimed one.

"No, no! Thursday is about the mark!" and so on, each naming a different day; the younger men backing their opinions with wagers of various amounts.

On Lady Helmsford the tidings produced a strong effect. The plot was thickening; what she had to do she must do quickly. Yet she scarce acknowledged to herself that, with all her daring, she shrank from the scene with Maud which was before her. Not that she hated giving her pain, though to this she was not quite indifferent, but the picture of Maud blushing for her when she boldly confessed her love for Monteiro, the tender shame she knew that proud yet simple girl would feel at such an avowal, made her turn hot and cowardly; but it must be done. Nothing else would touch Maud so much; terrible as the price would be, costly in the depth of self-abasement into which she must voluntarily descend, she would pay it, even to the uttermost farthing, rather than renounce the delightful dreams which had brought back to her world-beaten heart something of youth's delicious freshness. The King's return would enable Monteiro to bring matters to a crisis, for she felt, rather than thought, that he had revealed his plans to her, but partially so; to-morrow—ay—to-morrow she would decide Maud's fate.

"I am somewhat weary, Lord Chedworth; be so good as to call my carriage and my people," exclaimed the Countess, starting from her thoughts.

It was the morning of the following day. Maud was reading some numbers of the *Spectator*, which her residence in France had hitherto prevented her from enjoying. Dorothy was busy at her needle, glad to see her dear lady so much better as to read on quietly, for she had been terribly restless of late.

"And has the Countess not asked for me?" said Maud, looking up from her book. "Why, 'tis nearly three days since I have seen her."

"Well! she used oftener to be four nor three," said Dorothy soothingly.

"Yet it is very strange and distressing," murmured Maud, drawing from her pocket an oft-conned note which had reached her in the afternoon of the day on which her aunt had visited Monteiro, and seeing Dorothy absorbed in her stitchery, she read it once more :

"I have done your bidding, dearest cousin and wife—forgive the word! I cannot erase it! The Countess now knows all my devotion to you—knows that I am the mysterious bridegroom; but I have thought it wiser not to reveal my true name and station; let this be a guide to you. Let *nothing* persuade you to renounce me till we can once more speak together. Be brave and patient yet a little while, and, in any case, all will be well for you!

"Ever your loving servant and husband,

"RUPERT L——."

The Countess knew all! and yet had sought no explanation with herself! Maud could not understand it; reason with herself as she would, the absence of all demonstration seemed terribly ominous. If Lady Helmsford was angry, why did she not come and express her anger with her usual impetuosity? if her anger was so deep as to need regulating and concealment, Maud felt indeed as if she were but in the beginning of troubles. In preparation for such a possibility she approached the fire, and committed the note to the flames. It was strange that, in spite of his promises to set her free—to make no attempt to uphold the marriage, which indeed he could not—her cousin Rupert persisted in signing himself her "husband." It was scarcely right of him, though of course it would be of little importance. Would he be successful in winning her inheritance for her? and if so—or, indeed, if not—how could she show her gratitude for his great devotion to her? which was none the less precious in her sight because she thought some—a good deal—of it was due to regard for her dead father. But all *these* considerations were dwarfed by the immense un-

easiness caused by Lady Helmsford's silence and non-appearance. Thus thinking, she knelt still by the fire, and was almost startled into a scream by a tap at the door.

"Come in," she said faintly.

It opened to admit the slim, affected little figure of Mistress Letitia Sparrow, who came nominally to ask after Maud—really to relieve her mind by a little gossip with Dorothy.

"Well, I am sure I do not know what is going to happen," she exclaimed, after the polite preliminaries were duly performed. "What do you think?"

Maud's heart beat with apprehension; but Dorothy, who was a little cross from the long spell of seclusion she had lately endured, and had just at that moment a difficulty in threading her needle, said a little dryly:

"Oh! you may as well tell at once! I haven't the ghost of a thought left in me."

"Dear Mistress Dorothy! you are always so bright," returned Mistress Sparrow, with her head on one side. "Well! do you know! my lady has sent off Mr. Chifferil all the way to Yorkshire! The poor man started this morning; and terribly loath was he to go such a long dangerous journey. He was up half the night, Mr. Hobson has been telling me, making his will, and such like."

"Oh! bless us and save us! what's that for?" said Dorothy, laying down her work.

"Does my aunt not usually send him on such errands?" asked Maud, struck by the remembrance that Chifferil had evidently been an ally of Monteiro's.

"I never knew her dispatch him to Helmsford, or indeed anywhere far away, before; I think her ladyship cannot be well; she was up and doing so wondrous early this morning."

"Faith, you are a wonderful set of people," exclaimed Dorothy; "when you are well and hearty you lie in bed, and when you are 'indisposed,' as you call it, you get up at cockcrow."

"Why do you think my aunt is unwell?"

"Because, sweet Mistress Langley, as I was going into her room this morning, that impertinent upsetting per-

son, Mistress Beville, was coming out ; so she said—‘You needn’t trouble to go in, Mistress Sparrow,’ says she ; ‘my lady is not very well ; she has been up this hour and more,’ she says, ‘and very much engaged, so she doesn’t want you.’”

“I think that Mistress Beville wouldn’t mind saying more than her prayers,” said Dorothy sagely.

“I fear me much she does not say many prayers,” replied Mistress Sparrow, shaking her head with disapprobation.

“But there is no doubt my lady has been monstrous busy writing a quantity without any help ; and the green chariot and grays were in the city yesterday, so Thomas told Cicely, the second housemaid. I feel a sort of all-overness myself, as if something was going to happen—I do not know what.”

“Dear heart, no !” cried Dorothy.

“Why do you think so ?” asked Maud gently ; “Lady Helmsford is generally much occupied.”

“Ay ! dear lady ; but she would go nowhere last night : she sat at home and alone the whole evening. Moreover, there was to have been a reception and card-party on Tuesday, and part of poor Chifferil’s work yesternoon was writing notes to put it off.”

“Well, I fear we can but believe Lady Helmsford is really ill, in spite of her early rising—I trust it is not so,” cried Maud, a sensation of dread creeping gradually over her heart. “Why should I not go and ask ?” she continued, restlessly rising and moving towards the door. “None are so near of kin, after mother and daughter, as aunt and niece, and yet we are almost strangers.”

“I pray you, my dear young lady, do not so,” cried Letitia ; “my lady does not like to be thought ill, or to want care ; she would, perhaps, repulse you.”

“Set her up,” said Dorothy, with an air of scorn ; “she ought to be proud to have such a niece : and what is she, to be different from the rest of the poor creatures about her ! Ah ! God help us ! It’s well there are eyes *so far above us*, that the difference between high and low *must seem small indeed*.”

"Anyway," concluded Mistress Sparrow, "I never knew my lady in quite such a way before. I did speak to her for a few minutes in the boudoir this morning, as I wished to tell her poor little Mab would not eat her breakfast—but she did not heed me ; and as Mr. Hervey, the solicitor, was announced just then, I came away. I have, therefore, acted to the best of my judgment respecting Mab, and I trust it will *prove* for the best."

"I'm sure *I* do, for your own sake as well as for the little brute's," cried Dorothy.

Maud, too much disturbed by Mistress Letitia's conjectures, as well as too polite to read, took up her embroidery, as an excuse for thinking. All that she had heard made her aunt's avoidance of her more threatening. She feared she had offended past reconciliation by concealing her knowledge of Monteiro's identity : yet she could not blame herself for being guided by him in a matter he evidently thought of so much importance.

Still, was it not cowardly in her not to go down boldly and face her aunt? She had done nothing wrong ; she—

"My lady the Countess wishes to speak with Mistress Langley in her dressing-room immediately," said one of the footmen, opening the door, after having tapped for admittance.

"Goodness preserve us ! you've taken away my breath," cried Letitia.

Maud rose silently, and crossing to Dorothy, kissed her brow, as if she was herself going to execution, then without a word followed the servant who had summoned her.

Dorothy looked after her and shook her head.

"Ah ! my darlin', you are too young to be so fretted !" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LADY HELMSFORD had been apparently pacing the room when Maud entered. She was still in her *robe de chambre*—deadly pale—her hair turned back from her face in a loose wavy mass. She stood still when Maud entered, and kept silence even after the door was securely closed upon them both. Something, she knew not what, save that she *felt* it was hatred, gleamed in the stern eyes fixed upon her by her aunt.

"You have been ill!" cried Maud, fearful of waiting longer in silence. "You are still unwell! why did you not send for me before?"

"So! Maud Langley," said Lady Helmsford, speaking slowly, and never moving her eyes from the face that flushed nervously beneath them, "you have found your bridegroom; you are the wife of Juan di Monteiro!"

"No! madam," returned Maud, gathering courage now the awful silence was broken; "I do not consider myself his wife; the ceremony which we went through is not binding on either."

"How long have you known he was your bridegroom?"

"Since the night he rescued me."

"Over ten days! ten days and nights you have enjoyed the safe shelter of my roof—you have eaten of my bread and drank of my cup—and hidden this thing from me!" said Lady Helmsford bitterly—contemptuously.

"Indeed, dear aunt, it was ill done; and I was miserable until you knew all." Maud stopped abruptly, too loyal to clear herself by blaming another. "I—that is we—thought it wiser to keep the matter entirely secret—"

"We," interrupted Lady Helmsford, with suppressed fury, "we! Do you assume the conjugal style already? This does not tally with your declaration that you do not consider yourself his wife."

"Madam," said Maud, endeavoring to take her hand, "I have done wrong in concealing my knowledge from

you for an hour ; but be generous ! forgive me ! at least the matter was voluntarily revealed to you."

"Ah ! Do you know *how* it was revealed ? " asked the Countess, her cheeks growing crimson.

"No, dear aunt ; I only know I implored Monsieur di Monteiro to tell you, and he has done so."

"Stand back, traitress ! do not touch me ! You implored Monteiro ! Where did you meet this husband whom you do not mean to acknowledge ?—beware, girl ! one meeting without witnesses might suffice to rivet your chains with a man even of ordinary honor, if he cared to do so."

Maud's color left her cheek so visibly at these words that the Countess saw, and determined to profit by, the terror she had created.

"Indeed, madam, I only spoke to him here—in this house—only a few words ; and I think he is too truly a man of honor to break the promise he has given to hold me free."

"He has promised you this," said Lady Helmsford, looking at her keenly, and forgetting in the hope it suggested to ask further as to the meeting. "Come, Maud—I have been deeply and sorely hurt at the want of confidence you have shown ; so deeply, that for a whole day I have not trusted myself to see or speak to you. Now sit down ; I will try to forgive you—and let us see what is best to be done."

"Oh, thank you ; you are indeed good to me, dear aunt," cried Maud ; "I shall gladly follow your advice—for you are wise as well as good."

Lady Helmsford was silent for a few minutes. "Maud," she said at length, "I see you are in a position of great difficulty : your marriage with Monteiro must be kept the most profound secret. If John Langley knew of it ! He would go any lengths of cruelty and outrage to compel you to be his son's wife. So far, Monteiro is right. You say you are anxious to be freed from this temporary marriage ; is this truth ?"

"It is, madam," said Maud faintly.

"You are wise," returned Lady Helmsford, still keep-

ing her stern eyes fastened on Maud's face ; " because we must remember that however honorable Monteiro may be, he is a stranger, of whose resources we know nothing. He has some scheme in his head which, if it succeeds, will make you a rich prize—and then he proposes to turn this phantom of a marriage into a real one. Maud, this man has told you of his love ! "

" He has," she replied, her color returning with a vivid blush.

Lady Helmsford flung aside the hand she held, with an angry gesture. " And you believed him ? "

" Alas ! madam, 'tis hard to know what to believe ; but he *seemed* in earnest. "

This time a smile lurked round the lips that spoke, and with the downcast eyes and blushing cheek made so sweet a picture that Lady Helmsford rose with a muttered exclamation, turned from her, walked down the room and back to her seat before she spoke again. " Ay ! he did not *seem* in earnest for the first time, I'll warrant ; he has sworn the same love to *me*—to fifty others. "

" I suppose so," returned Maud quietly, a certain scene returning to her mind, as well as Monteiro's emphatic assertion that he had never sought Lady Helmsford ; yet she was not quite able to forget the expression of his earnest pleading eyes and imploring accents.

" You suppose so ! " repeated the Countess. " Are you then really indifferent to him ? Speak ! Maud, speak ! "

" Indeed, madam, I am not indifferent to one who has so truly served and saved me ; but you do not suppose I could love—really love, give my whole heart to so great a stranger—one whom you, who know him so much better, think scarce deserving of belief ? "

" How incomprehensible to me is this halting between two moods ! " cried the Countess. " Then do you believe the love he professes ? "

" Not so much as in his real wish to befriend me," cried Maud ; " I might believe in his affection did I not think that—that you perhaps liked—that is cared for him ; and who would look at me when *you* were kind—"

Maud spoke with downcast eyes, as though confessing

some shame of her own, yet with sincere conviction of her aunt's superiority.

Lady Helmsford hesitated : should she bare the bruises of her pride to this insignificant inexperienced girl ! should she show herself less than her listener in dignity and self-control ! for in her heart she did not doubt that Monteiro had lavished all the passionate eloquence of which he was master upon the simple maiden he had a sort of right to call his wife : yet *she* had kept her judgment clear. No ! this was an additional humiliation the Countess could not brook. She would *not* confess her weakness ; and by this distrust of Maud's nobility and generosity she lost the game. She laughed scornfully.

"I care for Monteiro ! Yes ! as I care for those that give some charm to the passing hour ; his admiration amused me ; his character interested me ! But I know him, and do not wish to see you deceived. Maud, be ruled by me—make me your friend. Write a letter to Monteiro ! tell him you are pained by the ambiguous situation in which you find yourself ; ask him to send you a written renunciation of his possible rights ; tell him of your gratitude, offer him an ample reward when he shall have gained you your lands—I will help you to express it, though he must *never* know I did so,—and—Maud ! if you will do this—if you will be guided by me, I will be your friend, your sister, your mother—but you must obey,—here—here is the paper—the pen."

With feverish eagerness the Countess placed writing materials before Maud, who was shocked and startled by the vehemence her aunt could not suppress.

"You know," she continued, "however much I may like the amusement of Monteiro's society, we cannot deny that he is a species of adventurer—one knows not who ; and I ought not to encourage any love passages between you ; but you will write, child ?"

"No, aunt," said Maud, drawing back, "it is unnecessary ; I so far trust this gentleman as to believe his promise that he will not attempt to claim me. If he should be disposed to break it—why, you all tell me he cannot enforce this marriage ; besides I would not for world

offend him with any offer of reward. Why write or make any motion? let him carry out his plan, whatever it may be; 'twill be time enough to act after."

"Maud!" cried Lady Helmsford, "you love this man! Listen to me: if you do not write as I dictate I shall not feel justified in keeping you here. I have already resisted John Langley's claim to your custody, and the responsibility of protecting you is more than I care to undertake. Should Monteiro carry you off, or, more likely, persuade you to go with him, I should be held accountable."

"Indeed, madam," exclaimed Maud indignantly, "you wrong Monsieur di Monteiro—he would disdain to do either!"

"Ha! you say so! Dare you look in my eyes and say he has not already tried?" cried the Countess fiercely: and Maud, recalling his first passionate outburst, stood convicted and covered with confusion.

"'Twas only for a moment he forgot himself," she cried, "and, in truth, I was so frightened I scarce remember anything distinctly; but oh! aunt! whatever my errors may be—and I cannot see in what I have sinned—do not terrify me by a threat of restoring me to my guardian."

She wrung her hands, and in spite of her brave efforts for self-control, the tears would come.

"Do not—do not!" she sobbed.

"Write!" said Lady Helmsford, "and you need fear nothing! Write! and I will shelter you from all molestation; but once let this matter reach John Langley's ears, he will seize you, and murder Monteiro. Come, give yourself a respite from all this misery: if you are indifferent to this man, write! or quit my house and seek shelter where you may!"

The words had scarce left Lady Helmsford's lips before she saw that the fulfillment of such a threat would only serve to drive her niece into the shelter of Monteiro's protection: she burned to recall them—especially as Maud, roused into self-possession, suddenly raised her head, which she had bent down on her hands, and looking steadily at her aunt, said gravely and firmly:

"Lady Helmsford, you are unjust. I have done nothing to deserve such threats; 'tis no fault of mine that Monsieur di Monteiro sought to save me, for my father's sake, by the only means in his power. Why are you thus enraged, madam? I never dreamed of rivalry with you; if you think Monteiro has been false to you, do you imagine I would accept a forsworn husband?"

"Insolent girl!" cried the Countess, stung by the sense of superior strength these words—unconsciously to the speaker—conveyed, "how dare you speak to me of rivalry! *you* a rival! *you* refuse to accept Monteiro! I believe you are more deeply committed to him than you dare acknowledge; I gather from your speech that you have seen him oftener than I know; your refusal to write, in accordance with your own professions, all prove to me that Monteiro and yourself have been fooling me with some devilish half revelation. I will know the whole truth; I will cross-examine your confidante—your complaisant duenna!" She darted to the bell as she spoke and rang it violently.

"Mistress Langley's woman! send her directly!" she exclaimed to the servant, who came in haste.

"She can tell but little," said Maud, still upheld by the indignation her aunt had roused; "I have told her nothing. Believe me, madam, the wisest course for us all is faith and patience. There is no need for this anger with me. The promise I have given to Monsieur di Monteiro I will keep."

"What promise? what?" said Lady Helmsford from between her closed teeth.

"That I would trust his word, keep the secret, and wait his time for unraveling the mystery."

This evidence of the good understanding between Maud and her lover-husband finished the perturbation and rage of the Countess. Maud's affectation of indifference then was a mere blind. Her firm refusal to write as the Countess dictated, a proof of her resolution not to break with Monteiro.

"Come here, woman!" cried Lady Helmsford to Dorothy, who entered, and, after dropping a deep curtsy,

stood at the door ; " come here, and tell me what you know of this marriage."

Dorothy, alarmed at the voice and look of her interrogator, glanced at the tearful, agitated countenance of her young mistress, and prepared herself to avoid all admissions.

" Sure, I have told you all about it before, my lady."

" No ! you have not told me the bridegroom's name."

" Why, that's what we all want to find out, my lady."

" Woman ! take care how you prevaricate. Do you mean to say your mistress has not told you ?"

" Ah ! how could she ? sure she doesn't know herself."

" You are a good actress, Mistress Dorothy ; nevertheless, I believe you know as well as I do that she is wedded to Monteiro."

" Oh ! blessed hour !" cried Dorothy, clasping her hands together in the blankest astonishment, " you don't say so ! Oh ! isn't he an illigant gentleman ! and what is he in his own country, my lady ? a lord or a duke ?"

" How can I know what to believe !" cried Lady Helmsford. " Tell me, you maddening creature ! where, and how, did he gain access to your lady ?"

" Oh ! faith, my lady, he never did ; unless, indeed, 'twas when he took her from those thieves of the world. Sure I have been with her day and night, and I will take my oath she never spoke to mortal in my hearing. If she saw him at all it was when he was taking tay with your ladyship."

" Heaven only knows if you are speaking truth or falsehood. My head turns."

" Ah, my jewel ! what is the matter at all, at all ?" cried Dorothy, turning to Maud.

" My aunt is much disturbed ; she thinks Monsieur di Monteiro an unsuitable partner for me ; and I refuse to make any step towards disengaging myself from him, because it is wiser and more just to trust him."

" Trust him !" cried Lady Helmsford ; " a reckless adventurer ! a man to whom women are toys to be deceived and cast aside—who—"

"Oh! the villain!" interrupted Dorothy, making a slight grimace to Maud, unseen by the Countess; "I am sure you ought to be obliged to my lady for telling you the truth. See, my lady, she looks as white as a ghost, and her eyes full of tears: hadn't she better come upstairs with me, and you just write—write what you think best—"

"I do not agree to that," murmured Maud.

"Go; leave us!" said the Countess more calmly, seeing that she could do nothing with Dorothy—that she was rather a support than otherwise to her mistress; "Mistress Langley will join you in a few moments."

"Hear me, Maud," she continued when they were again alone, motioning her to a seat; "I have been harsh and hasty, but I fear for your future, child. If you think that you are so bound by your promise to Monteiro, let me write to him; I will do so kindly and clearly, and then I shall feel justified in keeping the matter from John Langley. In truth, Maud, I love you—I only love not contradiction. Moreover, I have promised Lord Chedworth that he should see you to-day or to-morrow. Oh, Maud, there is your real chance of safety, happiness, rank, distinction! He is splendid in his liberality, charming in conversation, devoted to you! let him plead his own cause."

"No, no, my aunt," said Maud, smiling, her suspicions of Lady Helmsford's motives now thoroughly awoke; "I will not subject that good nobleman to the unnecessary mortification of a personal rejection. What! with the chance (for I believe there is one) of being in a few days rich, free, the world before me, the possibility of finding a partner of my own age and mind, shall I tie myself to a man, kind and pleasant, no doubt, lovable as a father, but not so as a husband? 'twould be but scant courage that would buy a few days' security at so high a price. I will dare what a week may bring forth; there is no need to take either Lord Chedworth or Monsieur di Monteiro at the end of it."

"Enough!" exclaimed Lady Helmsford. "This is defiance! 'Tis the ordinary run of gratitude. Leave me."

"No, not while you think me ungrateful!" cried Maud, taking her hand in spite of her aunt's efforts to withhold it. "You are unhappy and disturbed; you are unlike yourself. Be just, be generous. I would fain love you—why will you not let me?"

"Love me! You!—you, who have robbed me and turned my blood to gall! Go!—speak no more. Leave me, while I can restrain myself. Go! consider yourself a prisoner till I decide what to do." With a gesture of disdain and dismissal Lady Helmsford turned from her and again rang.

Maud, feeling that any further appeal was useless, left the room.

"Oh, Dorothy—dear Dorothy! do you forgive me for not telling you everything?" cried Maud, throwing her arms round the faithful creature's neck. "But I had promised—"

"Faith, I'll forgive you that fast enough! but what I will not forgive is for going and telling my lady!—she that's ready to ate him. Ah, what made ye do it at all, at all?"

"It was only right, Dorothy; I ought not to deceive her."

"Ah, then it's sorrow we'll sup for your right doing. Who's there?"

"Only Beville, Mistress Dorothy."

"Oh! walk in, ma'am." (*Sotto voce*) "What mischief is she after?"

"I beg pardon, madam," said the waiting-woman, curtsying with a stolid, set expression of face, "but my lady wishes the key of your chamber."

Without waiting for a reply she took it, curtsied again, and retreated. The next moment they heard it turn sharply in the lock, and knew they were prisoners.

"Well, if that is not a dirty trick I never saw one!" cried Dorothy. "Let me go, darlin'; there is another door out of the bedroom leads on to the back stairs—let me take the key out of that."

"'Tis useless, Dorothy," said Maud sadly. "Do you not think another would soon be found? We are in the

Countess of Helmsford's hands ; she must do as seems best to her."

"And bad will be that best," cried Dorothy, hastening away just in time to hear the sharp click of the second bolt as it was shot from outside.

"God forgive you, my Lady Helmsford," said Dorothy, trembling with fury, "for a revengeful, unwomanly devil ! I will see if I can't circumvent ye ! Faith now ! the windies is half way up to the moon, and the chimbley's mighty narrow. Ah ! if one had a dawshy bit of a chimbley-boy, like Gomez, now ! that Nature blacked as if a purpose to mock the soot."

"Is it locked too ?" cried Maud, coming behind her. "It is too bad—too insulting. I feel too angry to be frightened now. But oh ! pray God she may not send me back to John Langley !"

The evening after this stormy interview, Monteiro had returned from a visit to old Robilliard. He was extremely restless and uneasy at having heard nothing from Lady Helmsford. The silence and inaction of that lady seemed to him an evil omen ; besides, it was several days since he had seen Maud, and the pathos of her voice as she said, "Rupert, you are very good to me," still haunted his heart. What if Lady Helmsford had employed the time which intervened since their last interview in poisoning Maud's mind ! She might tell some tales that would sound strange to a young, imaginative, delicate girl ; but she might invent far worse. With all her passion and self-will, there was a certain amount of nobility and generosity in Lady Helmsford which inspired Monteiro with the hope that at least she would not be false. If he could but convert this proud, masterful woman into a friend, all might go well so far as Maud's safety was concerned ; beyond this at present he must not look.

Entering his lodgings somewhat cast down, he found a man in a mulberry-colored livery awaiting him.

"A letter, sir, from Sir Stephen Compton," said the messenger.

To seize and tear it open was the work of a moment.

"MY DEAR SIR,"—it ran—"I arrived here safely (although my bones still ache) yester even. I would be much gratified if you could breakfast with me by ten o'clock to-morrow ; I have much to do, and that is my most leisure time. I have good tidings, but they must keep. Let me have a reply by the hand of the bearer.

"I am, dear sir,

"Your obliged and obedient servant,

"STEPHEN COMPTON."

Monteiro quickly penned a grateful reply, and then, throwing himself into an easy-chair, gave himself to reflection, not untinged with sadness, although satisfaction predominated. That he would defeat John Langley's schemes he felt tolerably sure. That he would also win Maud's lands and rank for her he did not doubt ; but after ! how would it be with himself?—either bliss or woe.

If she was still averse to him, or if that dangerous, uncertain woman, Lady Helmsford, had employed the ample time at her disposal in poisoning Maud's mind against him, he could never sue to the wealthy heiress as he could have done to the penniless orphan. In fact the decision was now in her hands ; a few days—nay, a few hours perhaps—would proclaim her Baroness Langdale, mistress of a noble fortune. He was bound to resign his shadowy claim to be her husband, and to enroll himself amid the many pretenders to her hand who would soon spring up, with less advantage than the rest, in that he was poor and known to have strange adventurous antecedents. True he had been fortunate in being able to serve her ; but he rejected indignantly the idea of gratitude or reward. He yearned for her whole unreserved heart ; he burned to read tenderness in her soft, dark-blue eyes, to feel love in the lingering touch of her slender hand, to hear the clear tones of the voice that was music to *him* speak in the full confidence of trust and affection, to find the sweet, pensive, sensitive mouth given frankly, *willingly* to his kisses. But how slight was his chance of ever reaching such a heaven ! The only faint gleam

of hope that visited him was the memory of her accent and words when they last parted.

What was she doing now? Why might he not at least make an attempt to see her? He rose with this intention, and had opened the door to summon his valet, when he made his appearance ushering in Gomez.

Never was the little negro more warmly welcomed. Monteiro at first thought he must be sent by Maud, but he was soon undeceived. With many grins and duckings of the head Gomez produced a letter in Lady Helmsford's writing.

"Take him and feed him, Victor," said Monteiro; "bring him to me again when I ring," then he opened the letter and read as follows:

"I have spoken with Maud, dear Juan; and, I must admit, reproached her for the duplicity, which was even more reprehensible in her than in you. I have striven to do the best for you, though you would have served yourself better by confiding sooner in me. I find my niece is exceedingly anxious to feel herself quite free. She begs me to say she feels deeply the obligation under which she lies to you, and she hopes hereafter to reward your services; but she would feel happier if you would send by bearer a *written* declaration that you hold the marriage ceremony you went through null and void. It pains me to write thus to you, for displeased, nay, agonized, as I have been, I think you deserve more confidence from her. But 'tis hard to change nature, and hers is somewhat cold. A declaration as above would also relieve me (if I have still any weight in your eyes) from some difficulty. John Langley claims the custody of his ward. While I could declare my ignorance of the gallant who kidnapped Harold Langley, and my desire to preserve Maud from him, I could with a safe conscience oppose those claims. I can scarce do so now unless by your renunciation.

"I have recommended, for obvious reasons, that Maud should keep her room, but should you wish to address her, inclose your billet to me and she shall receive it.

She is, in truth, more composed than we could hope, but 'tis safer she should be reported *indisposed*. Farewell, dear Juan, trust me I shall ever be your devoted friend, however small the guerdon of affection you accord to

“E. HELMSFORD.”

Three times did Monteiro peruse this epistle before laying it down with some very strong Spanish expletives. He had a strong impression that it was written and composed without any knowledge on Maud's part. Maud had promised to trust him, and she would keep her word unless, indeed, Lady Helmsford had persuaded her to break it; even so Monteiro doubted that she had given her aunt permission to write thus, but to promise *him* reward for his services, as though he were an inferior, *that* she had never done! Lady Helmsford had outwitted herself there. If false in one point, why might not the letter be false in all?

He rang for Gomez and interrogated him. “Madam, her ladyship had been much at home and was not pleased with any one; had permitted Beville, that pig of a woman, to box him (Gomez) unrebuked. The beautiful Señorita he had not seen for days; many doctors had been to visit her, but she was still alive.”

“Madre di Dios!” cried Monteiro, seizing him by the shoulders; “is she really ill? speak, little devil!”

“Grazia, Señor! I think she is not bad, for Madam Dorothy has been to and fro the housekeeper's room, and smiles, which she would not do were the Señorita ill.”

“True, true,” replied Monteiro, gazing away into vacancy, and still holding Gomez's shoulder.

“There is a preparation in the household, Excellency. They say the Countess leaves next week for Paris; Señor Chifferil left this morning.”

“Chifferil! What, for Paris?” exclaimed Monteiro, much struck.

“I cannot tell whither he went, Excellency; but he started betimes and was sore vexed to go.”

“There is mischief afoot!” thought Monteiro; “Chifferil was a sheet-anchor in that house. Hark ye, Gomez,”

he said aloud ; " I must write a letter for you to take, and whenever you hear the name of Langley—listen. Moreover, should the Señorita be worse, come and tell me ; and stay ! here is a line for Mistress Dorothy." He hastily scribbled a few lines. " Don't let mortal see it save Mistress Dorothy—eat it—swallow it, rather than give it up to any one else ! "

Gomez nodded energetically, and placed it carefully in a tiny inner pocket that opened behind his third button.

They thought they had managed it neatly, little dreaming that poor Dorothy was safe under lock and key.

" Now for my lady the Countess," said Monteiro, taking pen and paper ; after a moment's thought he wrote :

" DEAR LADY HELMSFORD,

" I have your note, but think it unnecessary now to say more than this—I will call upon you to-morrow afternoon, when we can discuss the matters you allude to.

" Always your faithful servant,

" JUAN DI MONTEIRO."

A piece of civil evasion which infuriated the Countess, even while it set her counting the hours till the next afternoon.

The next morning rose clear, bright, sharp, as became the first week of March. Monteiro rose early, and started in good time for Chelsea. He chose the river as his highway ; his course passed the old gateway, sole relic remaining of York House, and Westminster stairs, away past the low-lying flats on the Surrey side and the numerous barges, wherries and pleasure-boats which business and an unusually fine day had brought forth to ply upon the silent highway.

Much did Monteiro muse on the characteristics of English life, and longed for the hour when he might claim his birthright of nationality.

He was too much a man to be only a lover, though his love was strong and deep. Still, even in his most passionate moments, he knew that were love swept out his

life, life itself, action, ambition, would not be annihilated ; though dull and dreary without the sun of warm affection, light enough would be left to work and win.

Thus thinking he landed and approached Sir Stephen Compton's house, which looked upon the river ; it was separated from the road by high railings and stood alone, a large garden and pleasure-ground stretching behind it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE great wrought-iron gates closed behind Monteiro with a clang as he passed through them and pulled a large bell, the handle of which hung by the door.

It was soon thrown open, and with a polite invitation to enter, the footman who opened the door led Monteiro across a handsome hall (from which a noble flight of stairs with gilt balusters led to the rooms above) to a library at the back of the house, where breakfast was laid.

Monteiro strolled to the window and looked out on a pleasant garden, with clipped yew trees and a sundial. Within, the walls were adorned with a few good Dutch pictures. Indian cabinets, China ornaments, and well-filled bookshelves, made up a very pleasing interior. Some specimens of feather and bead work were not unfamiliar to the visitor's eye, who guessed they were mementoes of Sir Stephen's short but restorative sojourn in his American Government.

Monteiro, however, was not left long to study the aspect of the chamber. A door, different from that by which he had entered, opened, and a lady whom he at once recognized as Mistress Compton, Sir Stephen's eldest daughter, entered. She was a tall and somewhat stiff figure, considerably past her first youth ; she wore a dress of dark green lutestring, a white sprigged muslin apron and fichu, or cross-over, trimmed with narrow edging, and her pale brown weak-looking hair, turned back over a *small* cushion, was covered with a cap and lappets of the same lace ; she was slightly rouged, but colored be-

neath it with evident pleasure when she saw Monteiro. She made the usual curtsy, however, before addressing him, and then, holding out her hand in a long black lace mitten, she exclaimed :

“Captain Monteiro! I am truly pleased to see you again!”

He took and bowed over the hand she offered.

“My father will be here directly,” she continued, “but he is not so early as is his usual habit; he has scarce yet recovered his wearisome journey from Hanover.”

“And he is infinitely good to admit me so soon! Permit me, madam, to express the pleasure I feel on seeing you in apparently so much better health than when I bade you adieu—now more than two years ago!”

Mistress Compton smiled a kindly though wavering smile. She was one of the women who, at forty or fifty, have not outlived girlish timidity; a sweet slight nature not rich enough to ripen into true maturity, too sound and pure to be soured by years and disappointment; she might lose the freshness of youth, but could never gain the force and dignity of experience. Nevertheless, she had, unconsciously to herself, been the stay of her somewhat selfish and dilettante father, and the real bond of union between him and his younger daughter, who resembled him; both loved and sacrificed her!

“I am, thanks be to God, in much better health, sir,” she returned. “I think the heat and cold of America tried me much; then the sore terror and pressing danger, from which you so gallantly delivered us, preyed long upon my nerves.”

“And how fares Mistress Phillis, your sister?”

“She has been married a year and more,” replied Mistress Compton, ringing for the breakfast to be served. “Married to Master Leatham, of Leatham Court in Wiltshire. I have just returned from visiting her, during my father’s absence with the King. She knew that I was to see you, and charged me to deliver her best compliments and regards, hoping you will visit her at her country-seat, in which desire her husband begged to join.”

Before Monteiro could make any answer the door again opened to admit the master of the house.

Sir Stephen Compton, though scarce of middle stature, and now a mere shadow of his former self, had evidently been a very handsome man, and gave himself the "beauty airs" which are not exclusively practiced by the fair sex. He was wrapped in a flowered silk *robe-de-chambre*, and wore elaborately-braided slippers; but his wig was duly curled, and his cravat tied with studied negligence.

"Ah, my dear young friend! I rejoice to have an opportunity at last of welcoming you to my house. It has been a devilishly unlucky *contretemps* that I should have been away when you first came to England; but we must make up for lost time. How goes it, my gallant Captain?"

So saying, the gay Baronet shook hands with his guest very cordially.

"I am charmed to see both yourself and Mistress Compton look so well, and greatly indebted for this prompt admission to your presence."

"Zounds, sir!" cried the host, "if *you* had not been prompt on that terrible occasion, our captors would have made short work with us! But sit down, Monteiro—sit down. I really feel the ghost of an appetite flittering in my interior; 'tis too rare and precious a visitant not to be gratified at once."

They placed themselves at table, Sir Stephen speaking only of common topics while the servants were in the room.

"What will you take, my dear sir? hot tea? No, I thought not. There is some very decent Bordeaux; and let me recommend that Rhenish wine; 'tis not yet much known or liked in England, but I think it has a rare flavor."

"Hand the cutlets to Captain Monteiro," said the lady of the house.

"Have you no *pâté*, Anne?" asked her father.

"Yes, sir; 'tis opposite Captain Monteiro. Pray help yourself, sir."

At last, the ghost of Sir Stephen's appetite being laid,

and the edge of his guest's blunted, the servants were dismissed, and Mistress Compton, on a hint from her father, apologized, curtsied, and withdrew.

"Come, now, Monteiro! let us discuss our plans," said Sir Stephen, stirring his second cup of chocolate.

"By the way, what do you wish to be called?"

"After I have been recognized by the King, my real name—Langley. And tell me, sir, how do you think I stand?"

"Well, my friend, right well! I have told His Majesty your wondrous tale. Now, there's no man to whom a bit of romantic gossip is so welcome as your Sovereign, whose life is one of unavoidable routine; and I flatter myself I have primed him well. Thrice have I recounted the chapter of our gallant rescue—decks slippery with blood, my rifled treasure-chest, our slaughtered crew, my terrified fainting daughters cruelly lashed to the mast, to await the brutality of our captors; my own hands bound with every indignity behind me, in expectation of walking the plank; the sudden clearing of the fog in which we had been enveloped; the appearance as by magic of your gallant schooner, the first and well-directed shot that cut the mainbrace, the desperate exploit of boarding from your boats, the hand-to-hand encounter, and our final deliverance. Then his gracious Majesty was charmed to know the secret history of the pardon, before Sunderland or Craggs or any of them. Oh! you stand very well; moreover, I think the King is disposed to take you into his service—there will be fighting with Spain before the year is out. Tell me, Monteiro, why do you not marry the young heiress? You would make her a capital husband, and a proper Lord of Langdale; these peerages in the female line are a mistake."

"Ah, Sir Stephen! how do you know the lady would consent?"

"Pooh, pooh! I do not think so meanly of you, but that you would know how to win her. But tell me, now that we can converse *viva voce*, how did you get hold of the pardon?"

"'Tis as curious a story as the rest," said Monteiro,

declining the Flemish and helping himself to Birdseye. "You must know that there was a certain Irishman, who had fought at Blenheim in King Louis's famous Irish Brigade in my father's service. I believe my father had known him in Ireland at the siege of Limerick; and, after finding him in sore distress, took him on board *Le Folle* more from compassion than any other motive. Well, when after I had lost my noble father and captain, and decided to venture the sea, D'Arcy, the man of whom I speak, was among the first I encountered. He had some wish to return to Ireland I believe, and, at any rate, made his way to London. You must remember, he was of our party the night my father was so treacherously murdered. Well, being one day in a tavern, somewhere in Whitechapel, he heard a half-tipsy ragabonkin of a fellow boast that he was going to make John Langley's fortune and his own; that he could supply what would make a rottenman of Langley, and much to the same effect. D'Arcy pricked up his ears at the name, plied the man with liquor and questions, but could only draw from him that he was going to see Langley that evening to clinch the business. Some lucky wave of thought suggested to D'Arcy that whatever it was that lent the owner importance in John Langley's eyes, was probably a written document, and on his person; so D'Arcy watched and followed him. In a suitable place he overtook and felled him to the ground, rifled his pockets, and, sewn between the lining and outside of his coat, found the pardon. D'Arcy could but half understand it. However, the names of Langdale and Langley made him see it was of value."

"What marvelous luck! What an admirable bravo!" ejaculated Sir Stephen.

"He did not like to confide the document to any one, so he wrapped it in a parcel, sealing and directing it to me. This he gave into the care of another old follower of ours, the owner of Lamb's coffee-house, near Holborn."

"I know it," said Sir Stephen. "Go on."

"He managed to send me a few lines, stating that the

pardon was found ; but I had sailed for France, and the letter did not reach me. He managed to write a second, which he did more than a month after date. He then started for Paris, hoping to find me. We crossed on the way, but we finally met at Lamb's ; since which time I have waited with what patience I could muster for the King's return and yours."

"A marvelous tale as ever I heard !" cried Sir Stephen ; "and meantime poor Langdale's daughter is safe ? I mean, that scheming rascal, John Langley, has not succeeded in wedding her to his son ?"

"No, sir ! Her marriage with an unknown stranger has not yet been dissolved."

"Ah, I had forgotten ! That, too, is beyond the ordinary run of gossip. Have you any idea who the hero of that shrewd plot can be ?"

Monteiro hesitated a moment. Should he speak out the whole truth ? A nameless reluctance kept him back.

"I have an idea," he said ; "but it is not yet time to utter it."

"Indeed !" replied Sir Stephen, looking at him keenly. "As you will ; and is the young lady still with Lady Helmsford ?"

"Yes," said Monteiro, and paused. "I am about to ask a great, perhaps too great a favor ; but I have a notion that my Lady Helmsford is scarce all she might be to her niece ; that, till her own household is organized, she might be better elsewhere. She is singularly destitute of friends and relatives. Would your daughter, the gentle Mistress Compton, object to receive her for awhile ?"

The proposition seemed to astonish Sir Stephen greatly, but not disagreeably. He was exactly the sort of man to enjoy appearing in the character of the genial, disinterested protector of prosperous people.

"My dear friend, if it were possible the young lady would prefer the shelter of my poor roof to the splendor of her noble aunt's stately mansion, I need scarcely assure you that my house, myself, and all belonging to me are most heartily at your and her service. So you and your

fair cousin understand each other ! Eh, my cunning galand ! I begin to smell a rat."

"In truth, sir," said Monteiro, smiling frankly, "since you have so kindly and freely granted my prayer, I do not think it loyal to keep my secret from you any longer. I am he who played the unhappy bridegroom's part in the Langdale marriage."

"The devil you were ! Why, Monteiro, you would beat Condé himself in stratagem and resource ! So the heiress is yours ? I am indeed pleased at this intelligence ; but why the *unhappy* bridegroom ?"

"Because the lady declines to be my wife ; in short, my dear friend, I particularly wish to set her free, so soon as she is safely made a ward of Chancery, and in your charge."

"Then is the Countess of Helmsford over-anxious to push your marriage with her niece ?"

"Far from it ; she urges other claims. But all I want is that my fair and noble cousin shall be left quite free."

"Fore God, your honor is over-scrupulous ! How do you know the lady will prove unkind ?"

"Let us discuss this no more," said Monteiro, firmly. "You have kindly promised to receive her, if necessary ; we must leave the rest to arrange itself. Now tell me, when may I hope to see the King ?"

"There I have done great things for you ! His Majesty proposes to give you a private audience, immediately after he has received Lord Sunderland, the day after to-morrow—Thursday. What say you to that ? I am to present you ! Have the pardon at hand, His Majesty can then confirm it, and the guardianship of the heiress can be transferred to the Chancellor."

"Your goodness—your energetic goodness overwhelms me !" cried Monteiro, his heart beating, his cheek flushing at the idea that the longed-for day of deliverance was at hand.

"My dear sir," returned the Baronet, with polite gratitude, "even so, the balance of obligation will not be adjusted. I am still heavily your debtor. You had better join me at the palace about noon, or half-past ; we must

be at hand to obey the summons to His Majesty's presence."

"You may trust my punctuality," said Monteiro with a smile; "and you believe all will go well?"

"I feel tolerably secure," replied Sir Stephen calmly. "What I most fear is John Langley getting scent of our proceedings. He is, from all I hear, a shrewd, bold fellow, and stands well with Berkeley and Craggs. Had he succeeded in wedding the heiress to his son, all would have been safe for him; he has interest enough to have had the attainder reversed. Had he time he would manage to be still left guardian. Do you know, my friend, it would be a good plan to persuade the young orphan to be your wife *de facto*, before Langley can make any disturbance. You surely do not mean to let slip so fair a chance of fortune?"

"I do," said Monteiro resolutely. "God forbid I took advantage of the sore strait to which my noble kinswoman was reduced! Besides, I am no match for her in fortune."

"Come, come, Monteiro! you like some dark-eyed Spanish beauty! hence these scruples?"

"No, Sir Stephen!" cried Monteiro warmly; "there's no woman to compare with Maud Langley in my mind. If I loved her less, I would have fewer scruples; but she does not care to admit my claims. She is so young, so tender, and has been so sorely tried, she has no thought for love."

"She must be a very remarkable young woman," said Sir Stephen dryly. "However, a true lover is, they say, modest, though 'tis not exactly the quality I should expect in a bold buccaneer. You know your own affairs best, no doubt. At all events, the young lady will be an honored and a favored guest in my house."

After some more discussion and settlement of the details of Monteiro's presentation, they adjourned to Mistress Compton's morning-room, where they found her copying some letters for her father. Sir Stephen explained the intended interview with the King, and its objects, giving a short graphic account of Maud Langley's posi-

tion, suppressing, however, the mysterious marriage with her cousin.

The kind Mistress Compton was deeply interested, and warmly assured Monteiro of the pleasure it would give her to welcome his kinswoman, but appeared to share her father's surprise at his wish to remove her from the care of her aunt.

Then Sir Stephen insisted on showing his pictures and objects of "vertu" to Monteiro, talking a jargon concerning them which was Greek to his hearer, whose patience was sorely tried. He burned to be alone, to arrange his thoughts, to marshal his mental forces, and strengthen himself for the act of renunciation he feared was before him. He would be stronger, he thought, but for the memory of Maud's accent when she uttered the last words he had heard from her lips—"May God protect you!" To this remembered music he listened with all his soul, while Sir Stephen prated of foregrounds and "chiar-oscuro," "flesh tints," and "depth of color," the accomplished Baronet thinking all the time how graceful and admirable was his *protégé's* gravity and attention.

At last Sir Stephen's coach was announced, and Monteiro was released. "Let me set you down at your lodgings; I believe you have no conveyance waiting," said the courteous host; and Monteiro accepted.

But on the road he changed his destination. He could not resist the eager desire to ascertain how matters were going on at St. James's Square. Perhaps Lady Helmsford might be out; in any case he would see Maud. So he stopped the carriage in Pall Mall, bade Sir Stephen good-day, and proceeded to Lady Helmsford's house, his heart beating high, his veins thrilling with the hope that the weary time of prudence, waiting, and inaction was at last over, or nearly over. It was the omission from his thoughts of that little qualifying word "nearly," implying "not completely," which threw Monteiro off his guard.

The time which had elapsed since the Countess had imprisoned Maud in her chamber was the most miserable

of her life. Mortified and disappointed beyond the power of language to convey, Lady Helmsford found it impossible, even with her trained social skill, to face society with becoming composure. She kept the house—her own private apartments—reckless of what society might say. She ordered Beville to reply to inquiries by stating that she was occupied with Mistress Langley, who was seriously unwell, and with preparations for her journey to Paris, whither she intended to remove her niece. Really, her plans were chaotic. She did intend to leave London ; but, respecting Maud, she changed from hour to hour. She felt how cruel it would be to abandon her to John Langley ; she knew how ill it would look for herself. Moreover, it would be an unsatisfactory revenge, and one which would convert Monteiro from a possible lover into a bitter hater ; besides, she was not without some feeling for Maud, though desperately enraged by her spirit and innate dignity. She had not seen her since she had ordered her to her room ; she shrank from the idea of meeting her eyes. At times she thought of her youth, her isolation, her helplessness. Again the vision of Juan suing to her with all the tenderness and passion she felt, rather than knew, he could express, set her blood on fire with rage and hatred. He had been guarded in his speech respecting Maud, but the tone of his voice, the expression of his face, revealed more than she dared to recall. And he was Maud Langley's husband ! A word, a look from her might convert the marriage into a reality. For Lady Helmsford knew enough of the daring and resolution of her former admirer, to feel sure that he only wanted his bride's consent to dare, and evade all that guardian and protectress could do to keep her from him.

Tossed thus on the tempestuous sea of her own thoughts, Lady Helmsford's sole comfort was derived from the prospect of leaving London. A vague unreasonable hope tinged her dreary horizon—the hope that once she was really gone, Monteiro would follow. But what—what should she do with Maud ? She hurried on the preparations for her journey with feverish energy, and gave strictest orders that Mistress Maud and her woman should

have everything they desired, save liberty ; she even sent a kind message to her niece, assuring her that it was best and safest for her to be imprisoned, and then wished she could recall it.

The same morning that Monteiro breakfasted with Sir Stephen Compton, Lady Helmsford was roused from her deep, sullen abstraction, as she brooded moodily over her dressing-room fire, by the entrance of Beville, who said :

" Master John Langley is below, and begs to be admitted to your ladyship."

" Admit him," returned the Countess, without an instant's hesitation.

" How, my lady ! here ? " Beville was a little uneasy at her mistress's strange ways of late.

" Well, in the next room."

" And your dress, my lady ? "

" 'Tis good enough for the fellow ; do not be an idiot, Beville—bring him up."

Beville, much wondering, obeyed.

" Well, Master Langley," cried the Countess, walking into the study which adjoined her dressing-room, " I have expected to see you."

" Indeed, madam ! " returned Langley, looking with some surprise at the unusual negligence of her dress. " I have called in consequence of a rumor that has reached me. Is it true that your ladyship means to leave for Paris immediately ? "

" I do not know," she returned, gazing as if she saw him not.

" Surely your ladyship must know your own intentions ? "

" Scarce exactly," she replied, collecting herself.

" Because I must resume the custody of my ward's person, if such is the case," said Langley. " I have from courtesy postponed intruding my physician upon Mistress Langley, but I can do so no longer ; he now awaits your permission to ascend and ascertain her present condition."

" 'Tis needless," said Lady Helmsford slowly, and motioning Langley to a seat. " My niece is well—well enough to go to your house, to travel, to do anything."

"Your ladyship is frank," said Langley, surprised and fearing a trap. "I rejoice to receive so good a report of Mistress Langley's health. I presume then, that to-morrow at furthest she may take up her abode in my house?"

Lady Helmsford was silent for a moment, and then said, looking very straight into John Langley's eyes, "You are, of course, at liberty to take her to-morrow; but I ask you to wait. I may wish to *send* her to you to-morrow; I may wish to keep her with me till I go to Paris. Will you leave it thus, Master Langley? You may trust me; I no longer wish to assume the task of protecting Maud Langley. She is willful and troublesome! Do you still think of wedding her to your son?"

"I see no reason to alter my intentions," returned Langley, conscious of a perceptible though subtle change in the Countess, who spoke and moved like one in a sort of dream, or acting mechanically under some strong pressure. "But I will leave the task of reconciling her to my son. I—ahem—" for an instant the enormous lie troubled Langley's utterance—"I was not aware the young man was so partial to his cousin; and probably when she sees him worn by sickness—sickness caused by her cruelty—her feelings may alter."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," said the Countess very thoughtfully, while her heart whispered, "it is possible! girls are weak and easily persuaded; but if she can be induced to wed Harold, Monteiro is mine! How is your son, sir?" she added aloud.

"Better, madam, though still weak. I have sent him to the country, for change of air and quiet."

"That's well. But how about his arm, Master Langley? They say it was broken."

"They say—who says?" asked Langley angrily. "Does your ladyship believe all the gossip that idlers invent?"

"I am glad 'tis not so," returned Lady Helmsford carelessly. She was growing anxious to dismiss him; she did not feel equal to the task of fencing. Her consciousness of the cruelty she knew she would be guilty of,

weakened and confused her. As George Eliot writes, "The concentrated experience which, in great crises of emotion, reveals the bias of a nature, is prophetic of the ultimate act, which will end an intermediate struggle." As yet she shrank from the baseness of delivering the young helpless orphan, who had trusted her, into the hands of so implacable a foe as her guardian—to a fate she dreaded worse than death—but in her inmost soul she knew she would do it. "If the young gentleman," she resumed after a moment's pause, "is so much attached to my niece, I can but wish him success. I am not yet too old, Master Langley," she added with a smile, which even John Langley felt was charming, "to sympathize with true love."

Langley was greatly puzzled. Something in her tone and manner conveyed a certain conviction of her sincerity; and yet he could not, and would not trust her. The utmost he would permit himself to believe was that some whim, some unexpressed cause of offense against her niece, had operated on Lady Helmsford to his (Langley's) advantage, and he must, if possible, seize the auspicious moment.

"Then, madam, why should we lose time? If your ladyship is thus well disposed towards my boy, permit me to resume the guardianship of my ward to-day, or at furthest to-morrow?"

"To-day!" cried the Countess in an accent of pain; "no, not to-day! no, not to-day! Why are you in such haste? you mean no ill to my sister's daughter! no, I am sure you do not! if you did—look you, Master Langley, with all your legal rights you should not have her! If I, Elizabeth of Helmsford, resolved, really resolved to keep her, it would be strange if I did not!"

"Probably, madam," replied Langley, shrewd enough to see that there was some motive working in her heart which would serve his cause better than contradiction. "I believe we are both anxious to befriend this peevish young woman; for the present I leave her in your hands, and while promising to leave her free in the matter of her marriage, I also confide my son's cause to your honor;

if you will not help his suit, at least do nought to prejudice it ! ”

“ I promise,” said the Countess, rising ; “ let my niece stay with me a few days more, I may not leave for Paris quite so soon ; at any rate you shall have due warning.”

“ I shall do myself the honor of calling to-morrow,” replied Langley, also rising, and accepting the dismissal with a bow.

“ What ! do you mistrust me, sir ? ” cried Lady Helmsford.

“ Far be it from me to distrust your ladyship,” he returned dryly. “ But as we have now joined forces ’tis but natural I should be in communication with my ally.”

The blood mounted to Lady Helmsford’s cheek, but she restrained the words that rose to her lips.

“ I will bid you good-day, sir,” she said coldly ; “ I am somewhat indisposed.”

“ Adieu, then, madam ; I leave your ladyship with the clear understanding that you admit my full rights as guardian of your niece, and are prepared to yield them when the time for your departure arrives.”

“ I wish you good-day, sir,” repeated the Countess, curtsying, so Langley had nothing for it but to bow himself out.

“ Her fate is in her own hands,” murmured Lady Helmsford, still standing where he had left her. “ If she will but be guided by me—what is John Langley, his hopes, his schemes, compared to my regard for Monteiro ? —I will be Maud’s friend, and a true, powerful friend, if she will let me, but ’tis in her own hands ! ” She turned from the table by which she stood and walked slowly into her dressing-room. “ Beville,” she said to that functionary, who was sorting and arranging a drawer full of lace ; “ how fares Mistress Langley ? have you spoken with her this morning ? ”

“ No, my lady ; Cicely took in breakfast when she went to make up the bed-chamber.”

“ How is this ! ” cried Lady Helmsford indignantly ; “ do you dare neglect my niece and leave her to be attended by a mere serving-wench ? though for her safety

sake I am obliged to keep her under lock and key, think you I would have her treated with scant respect?"

"I know your ladyship is all goodness," replied Beville, pursing up her mouth; "but if you only just heard how that unmannerly female, Mistress Dorothy Kean, abuses me, you would not wonder at my avoiding her! There is nothing too bad, and too aggravating for her to say, and she even hints at *you*, my lady!"

"'Tis of small consequence," said the Countess carelessly; "the woman is faithful, she does not understand my motives, and you must not therefore neglect her mistress."

"I suppose, my lady, that villain wants to run away with her again!" insinuated Mistress Beville, who, as well as Mistress Letitia Sparrow, had been much exercised in her mind respecting the strange action of the Countess in imprisoning her niece.

"He does!" she replied, clenching her teeth as if in pain; "and he shall not have her!"

"Mistress Langley desired to have speech with your ladyship," resumed Beville.

"I cannot see her to-day—I cannot!" cried Lady Helmsford. "Stay, Beville; take her a little note, or perhaps they would like Sparrow to go instead of you?"

"Oh! as your ladyship pleases!" returned Beville, with a toss of the head; "only Mistress Sparrow is so fond of my young lady, she will be leaving the lock unturned or some such trick, for that woman Dorothy craves so to be let roam about the house, that I'd wager the pair of lovely lace ruffles your ladyship gave me, against Molly the kitchen-maid's linen kerchief, that she has some scheme for getting her mistress free!"

"'Tis not so unlikely," said Lady Helmsford.

"And then," continued the waiting-woman, seeing she had produced an impression, "if your ladyship would not be angry, I caught that little — black fellow," Beville just suppressed an unflattering epithet in time, "twice lingering about the door and peeping through the key-hole."

"Did you?" cried the Countess, roused to instant

maddening perception. "He ! Monteiro's gift ! I must look to this !"

She stopped in deep thought ; the possibility of communications between Monteiro and Maud through her little black favorite flashed through her brain with a sudden sickening sense of treachery, of being opposed by a will as strong and tenacious as her own, of failure and defeat. What ! Gomez as well as Chifferil wavering in their allegiance to her ? both interwoven by Monteiro into the subtle web of watchfulness, with which he managed to surround that insignificant child by whom his thoughts seemed to be absorbed !

"Ah !" exclaimed Lady Helmsford at last, "bring my writing things !" she quickly traced a few lines. "There !" she said folding and directing it, "tell Giles, the head groom, to take this note to Mistress Ferrars, and let him take Gomez too ; let him see Gomez into the house, and then return, the little fellow is better suited to deliver a note to a lady than Giles. Stay," seeing a curious gleam in her waiting-maid's eyes, "light a taper, I will seal the billet ! There, Beville, see them off ; tell Giles not to lose sight of him."

This dispatched, she wrote a few civil words for her niece, which were ready for transmission when Beville returned ; then she lay back in her chair and thought—sometimes with painful clearness, sometimes with aching indistinctness, but always unpleasantly and with a tinge of despair—of the terrible collapse of all her hopes, of the straws to which she clung, of the dust and ashes into which her life had crumbled. Now, for the first time in her prosperous existence, she was struggling with a real sorrow ; she lived over and over again her brief acquaintance with Monteiro in Paris, accusing and excusing him as contending waves of feeling swept over her storm-driven soul.

CHAPTER XXV.

MINUTES or hours, Lady Helmsford knew not which, had passed thus when Beville again intruded herself.

"Don Monteiro is below," she said, eying the Countess sharply as she spoke, "and begs to speak with your ladyship."

"Monteiro!" cried Lady Helmsford, starting from the large chair in which she had been reclining. "Yes, of course!—No, I cannot, Beville; my *déshabille* is too outrageous: tell him I am unwell—suffering; if he really wishes to see me he may return in an hour. Come back directly with his reply—quickly, Beville."

The Countess remained in the same position, grasping the arm of her chair, as if turned to stone, during the short absence of her attendant.

"Don Monteiro will await your ladyship's pleasure," was the reply brought back by the envoy.

"Quick, then, Beville! I will only adopt a *négligée*, and the faintest tinge of rouge! or none?"

Lady Helmsford started to life as Beville spoke, and rushed to her toilet-table with these words: "How say you, Beville," looking intently into her glass, "rouge or none?"

"La! my lady, you look like a ghost."

"And men are seldom touched by ghostly looks, however deep the suffering they express! but Juan has feeling! I would fain stir his compassion. Now, Beville; how dull and slow you are! Give me my morning robe of crimson taffetas and velvet, roll up my hair! loosely, woman, loosely; if I discard the array of a full toilet, at least let me show the wealth of nature! What said Monteiro to you?"

"He asked keenly for Mistress Langley, my lady," replied the waiting-woman in return for her mistress's abrupt imperiousness.

"Ha! well, Chifferil and Gomez are out of the way;

none else will dare prate to him of the discipline I am forced to use ; but"—with a sudden eager flash of her dark eyes—"where is that fantastic ape, Sparrow? Go ! call her this instant, Beville—go ! " and Lady Helmsford stamped her foot with impatience.

Mistress Beville, nothing loath, hurried away, and fetched the amiable Letitia from an elaborate task of millinery which she was performing in the congenial society of Mab and Tab.

The *dame de compagnie* looked not a little startled and uneasy as she followed Beville into the room.

"Where did you find her?" cried the Countess abruptly.

"Above stairs, in her own room, my lady," returned Beville.

"That is well ! Tell me, Sparrow, have you been to see my niece this morning?"

"No, my lady."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No, my lady ; in truth, Mistress Beville seemed that fractious about my visiting Mistress Langley that—"

"Quite right, Sparrow—quite right," interrupted Lady Helmsford ; "to-morrow you can see her—to-morrow all may be well ; we will prepare for our journey to Paris : you must believe, Sparrow, that I am in all things ruled by an ardent desire to serve my niece—though after all, why should I care a straw what you think?"

"Indeed, my lady, I am sure your solicitude—"

"There, there ! do not prate to me—I want nothing more. But stay—stay where you are !" for Letitia had moved with alacrity to the door at this apparent dismissal—"stay till I have finished dressing."

This undertaking was now quickly completed, and Beville directed to summon Don Juan di Monteiro.

"Here," exclaimed the Countess, "here are some new ribbons for Mab and Tab ; go, my good Sparrow, and adorn those little creatures, and remain with them, in readiness should I require you to bring them to me."

Having thus secured all approaches to her secret, Lady Helmsford swept into the adjoining room, and, for a few

suffocating seconds, awaited the coming of her lost lover. And when he came his face, his very form, seemed penetrated by a new life ; there was a brilliancy, a depth of color in his eyes, and elasticity in his step that bespoke joy and triumph. But when his glance fell on the Countess, his expression changed and softened. She looked indeed ill and worn, though her eyes were feverishly bright, and nothing affected the grace of her superb figure.

"Dios !" he cried ; "it is indeed true ! you have been ill, dear lady ? how goes it with you now ?"

"Do not ask me, Juan ! *I have* been suffering—more in mind than body ; but let me rest ! what brings you here ? what and whom do you seek ?"

"You, in the first place," he returned, leading her by the hand she had given him to a seat ; "I want to report progress to you, and then—then I want to see Maud—Mistress Langley I mean. I have good news, fair Countess ; the King will see me on Thursday. In forty-eight hours I hope to see your niece proclaimed Baroness Langdale : may I not see her in your presence ?"

"You cannot," replied Lady Helmsford, pressing her hand to her brow, so as to hide her face for a moment, while she struggled to control its expression. "She too is unwell, or captious ; she will not see me ; she has locked herself in her own room, and insists on being undisturbed."

"Then she has either been offended or alarmed !" exclaimed Monteiro. "Tell me, dear Lady Helmsford ! do tell me the whole truth !—is she really ill ? She has had so much to try her, I tremble to think how her spirits must be shaken : I am sure she will see me ! I need not trouble her to descend—I might go to her : ask her, sweet Countess. Say I have tidings of importance ! she will not refuse !"

The eager anxiety of his voice and manner struck a deadly chill to his hearer's heart—no words could have shown her so clearly how his whole being was devoted to *her rival*.

"What !" she cried, shrinking as if from a blow, "do

you already seek to husband's privileges? Would you visit your bride in her chamber?"

"Hush, madam!" returned Monteiro sternly, while the dark red flush of anger rose to his cheek; "you well know how far such a hope is from my thoughts! It is not for you—her protectress—to suggest it."

"So much the better," said Lady Helmsford coldly; "for you do not seem very acceptable to the young lady. I have had a long conversation with her—which I am not at liberty to repeat—touching her life in France; and am bound to say I approve her motives for wishing to dissolve the singular tie which exists between you."

"Ah! then my fears——" began Monteiro impetuously, while the color faded from his face; but something in Lady Helmsford's eyes made him check his words. "Her disregard of me," he resumed firmly, "has nothing to do with the service to which I have devoted myself. I still demand to see Mistress Langley in your presence; do you wish to prevent our meeting?"

"You shall see," replied Lady Helmsford, rising and going into the next room. She was scarce a whole minute absent: "Beverly is not there!" she said; "ring yourself, Don Juan di Monteiro, and I will send your message to your wife."

"Do not mock me with this cruel repetition of a name I dare not, even in my heart, apply to the noble lady I only ask to serve," cried Monteiro passionately, but not forgetting to ring the bell indicated to him, and that with some vehemence. "You seem certain she would never admit my claim, even if I advanced it! Why then insult me thus? Is it from a simple love of giving pain?"

"Pain—to you! Ah, Heaven!" exclaimed Lady Helmsford, great tears filling her eyes and welling over unnoticed. "*You* know best how much I would endure and renounce to give you pleasure!"

"So it would seem," said Monteiro harshly.

The entrance of a footman prevented any reply.

"Where is Beverly? send her to me!" exclaimed the Countess.

The man retired.

"Where is Mistress Sparrow?" asked Monteiro, with dim uneasiness.

"How can I tell? do you wish to pick and choose amid *my* household?" returned the Countess haughtily.

Monteiro bowed in silence.

Beville lost no time in presenting herself.

"Go to Mistress Langley," said Lady Helmsford, very slowly and distinctly; "tell her that Don Juan di Monteiro is here, and has matters of importance to communicate, and that I also desire her presence; if she is averse to leave her own apartments we will visit her there."

Beville curtsied, and went on her errand. During her absence an awkward and constrained silence fell upon the Countess and her companion: the former sat resting her arm on the table beside her, leaning her head on her hand—Monteiro standing by the fireplace, still and stern, his eyes fixed on the door by which he expected Mistress Beville to re-enter.

"Mistress Langley's duty to your ladyship; she does not wish to see Don Monteiro, or any one. She is indisposed, and begs the gentleman to send his message," said Beville on her return.

"That will do—you may go," said Lady Helmsford; "unless indeed you wish to *send* your message," turning to Monteiro, and speaking with a slight tinge of scorn.

"That I shall not," he replied quickly, irritated by a vague suspicion of foul play, yet afraid of making a mistake by attacking the Countess. "If Mistress Langley is unwell, it is not for me to intrude upon her; if she has no desire to learn my tidings from myself, I need be in no haste to announce them."

Beville disappeared. A short silence ensued: Monteiro walked to the window and back, then threw himself into a chair.

"Come, Lady Helmsford," he exclaimed, "we have ever been good friends—tell me truth, however bitter! Why has Maud—why has your niece turned against me? *What* have you said of me? What has she confided to you? Is she—does she think of any one before me?—

some lover in France—some—oh ! speak ! do not look at me as if you knew all and would say nothing."

Stretching out his hand, he seized hers, and grasped it painfully tight ; but the Countess bore the pressure without flinching. Monteiro, in his passion, was forgetting that he had, to a certain length, played the part of this woman's lover : he felt so sure of Maud's freedom in another day, that he was off his guard.

Lady Helmsford pressed his hand for an instant, and then with a sudden impulse of impatience flung it from her.

"How dare I tell the truth to one so infatuated as you are !" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "Even were I not pledged to guard Maud's confidence, I dare not speak it."

"Break no pledge for me, madam," said Monteiro scornfully. "I see that whatever your motive, you do not intend to tell me truth."

"Yes I will, Juan," cried the Countess. "You are flattering yourself with false hopes. Maud does *not* love you ; she is barely grateful to you ; she shrinks from you ; her cold, thin, passionless nature is revolted by the fervor of yours. You waste your wealth of love on one who would be satisfied with coin less rich. Oh ! how is it that you turn from a heart as glowing as your own ! for one so poor, so weak, so irresponsible !"

In the agony of her supplication, Lady Helmsford stretched out her arms to Monteiro, her lips quivering, her dark eyes brimming over with unregarded tears. But Monteiro was inexorable. Irritated by a consciousness of treachery he must not express, made savage by this attack upon Maud, and the tone in which it was uttered, by a woman he did not think worthy to dust her shoes, he burst forth relentlessly :

"Irresponsible to me if you will," he exclaimed, springing to his feet and standing opposite the wretched suppliant, "but neither poor nor weak. If the purity and inexperience of her undeveloped nature make her shrink from the abruptness of my attempt to woo her, the fault is mine ! There is the virgin gold of affection, the truest

flames of love, under the snow of her present indifference, for him who shall be so blest as to call them forth ! This may not be my lot ; but shall I therefore be less ardent in her service ? I am no foolish boy to fancy my mood will never change. I hope it will, if it brings me nothing save sorrow ; but I tell you I would dare everything, forego everything, to feel the willing clasp of Maud Langley's arms—the touch of her cheek against mine—to hear her call me husband ! ”

He paused, breathless with his own vehemence.

Lady Helmsford had slowly dropped her arms as he spoke, the light and moisture leaving her eyes, and the color fading even from her lips. She stood fixed and silent, her face hardening into a deadly expression.

“ This may never be,” resumed Monteiro, regardless of the woman he was torturing ; “ but no insinuations, however cunningly masked, will ever persuade me that Maud cares more for any other man than for myself. I understand her better than you do, madam. Love enlightens more than hatred.”

He paused again. It was a bitter, almost a brutal, speech to one who, whatever her faults, he knew loved him well.

But though Monteiro had perhaps more than the ordinary share of chivalrous feeling, he was not so far removed from other men that he could restrain the relentless cruelty which is almost invariably called forth by women who grovel at their feet even while they cross their wills. Upstanding, ay ! and at her full height, is the only attitude in which woman can successfully deal with her master.

There was something ominous in the dead silence which followed, in the unwavering firmness of Lady Helmsford's pose.

“ I understand the full meaning of your words, Monteiro,” she said at last, slowly, as if giving heed to what she said. “ I understand the insulting comparison, between myself and my niece, which they convey. You have perhaps cut out the roots of my disorder a trifle ruthlessly. It only remains for me to give the surgeon his fee. Do you doubt that I shall pay in full ? ”

"I have no time or inclination to read riddles. If your ladyship has no further commands, I will wish you good-morning."

"Not yet," said the Countess impressively. "Not yet, Monteiro—listen. How is it that you who know *me*—you who know to the full the dangers which threaten the woman who is *now* the object of your passion, against which *I* am now her sole protection—how dare you exasperate me! You must surely credit me with more generosity than that of women! I might take a terrible revenge! Bold and resolute, and inventive as you are, you are a stranger—single-handed—almost unknown—what are you against the weight and authority of English law? A word from me, and Maud—"

"You dare not," interrupted Monteiro, startled but not frightened; "you dare not call in John Langley to aid your revenge! I am not single-handed now; forty-eight hours will give me rights which will supersede his. And for yourself, madam, think how such a tale, circulating like a snow-ball, with additions at every turn, will emblazon your name and character."

"I thank you for the friendly counsel," said Lady Helmsford, with a grand curtsy. "But do you not perceive that you have dragged me through the depths of degradation to the pinnacle of indifference!" Then with a sudden change of tone, "Never again can tongues wound me. Beware, Monteiro! you shall not insult and brave me with impunity."

Something in her voice made him feel he had been incautious, and renewed his anger with her by showing him his error.

"By Heavens!" he cried, "I shall force my way to Maud's apartments, and carry her away in the teeth of your household, rather than let her suffer even the temporary terror of your temper. I have found a safe and honorable asylum for her." He made a quick movement towards the door as he spoke.

"Do so!" cried Lady Helmsford, throwing herself between him and it. "Do so. Force yourself on her privacy, with this mere suspicion of yours as an excuse,

and ruin your chances. Hear me, **Monteiro** ! in justice, hear me ! ”

The Countess in her turn began to see that premature threats hinder their own fulfillment. The earnestness of her tone, the probability of her words made Monteiro pause.

“ You do not indeed know me yet,” she went on quickly, pressing one hand under her bosom as she spoke. “ You have cruelly wronged and goaded me ! Now compare my actions with my words. Scarce two hours ago John Langley stood where you do. He demanded Maud to be given into his hands this day. I changed my tactics. For your sake—ay—and for that of the—” Lady Helmsford stopped an instant, and added in a curiously softened tone, half whispered—“ the gentle girl herself. I stooped to speak flatteringly to the fellow. I persuaded him to grant me a little longer time ; talked of my journey to Paris (I am really going, Juan, so soon as Maud’s affairs are settled), and so he yielded and left, thinking he understood me. He will not trouble me again till I announce my intended departure. This will give you time, will it not ? ”

Again Monteiro’s brown cheek flushed, quite as much for the doubts that still lingered in his heart, as for shame at the possible injustice he had done.

“ Madam ! this is indeed a noble revenge for my hasty words ; but will you in truth and honor still keep my secret, and hold to the compact you have made with John Langley ? ”

The Countess smiled. “ I see you still distrust me. On my word I solemnly promise that I will retract nothing I have arranged with John Langley. In return, I ask that you do not come here to disturb me till after your interview with the King, then, if all goes well, I will hand over the custody of my niece to the safe and honorable guardianship you say you have found for her. You may trust me, Juan.”

“ I will—I do ! ” cried Monteiro, casting away his doubts. “ You are your own noble self again, and I will trust you utterly. Hereafter I may be able to prove my

penitence and gratitude. I will trespass no longer upon you. Suffer me to kiss your hand ere I leave."

"No," said Lady Helmsford, stepping back quickly ; "not now. On Thursday, when you have seen the King, and return triumphant to show Maud your great services, you shall kiss it, if you will."

She smiled one of her proud sweet smiles, which all the world thought so charming.

"You forgive my irritation and unreasonableness?"

"We shall exchange forgiveness, *mon ami*, on Thursday."

"Farewell, then, madam," said Monteiro, and retired, his last look at Lady Helmsford remaining long imprinted on his memory, as she stood motionless, one hand resting on the back of a chair, the other clenched, and lying at the full stretch of her arm against her dress—the sweep of her robe, her very smile and the turn of her head seemingly fixed as if carved in marble.

"She is a fine creature, and I am a brute to doubt her. After all, I said nothing so *very* offensive, that I can remember ; but my lady was always touchy."

So thinking, his heart full of Maud and doubts if she would ever consent to be his, Monteiro made his way to his lodgings, his fears for the time laid to rest.

Lady Helmsford stood for some time in the same position as when Monteiro left ; then she made a sudden staggering movement forward, as if she would have fallen, but, clutching the back of the chair, she saved herself. With a strong effort she mastered her feelings, and walked into her dressing-room, where she plentifully bathed her head and face with cold water, and even after this unwonted operation sat and thought intensely, before she rang for Beville.

When that personage made her appearance she was startled by her lady's wild and haggard look.

"La ! my lady, you are, sure, not well ! What ails your ladyship?"

"Nothing, Beville ; nothing you can help me in ; yet you can ! I want to go forth to-night with the strictest

secrecy. You must lend me your cloak and hood and petticoat. Bring them at once. I must see Mistress Sparrow. I shall tell her I am ill, that she must watch in the outer room, and let none come near me, as you are going out. Then, Beville, we will lock the door. You shall stay in my place, and I will go in yours. Bespeak a chair to take you—oh! somewhere; you surely have cronies whom you visit? On my return I will tap at the farther door of my room. You can let me in, and we will change places again. Oh, Beville, be true to me now, and I will make your fortune!”

“That I will, my lady,” said the waiting-woman heartily.

A day and night and part of another day had elapsed since Maud's imprisonment, and still she had received no communication from her aunt; nor had her messages been noticed. It was a period of great trial and uneasiness. What were the Countess's intentions in her present exasperated mood? At times, with a vivid recollection of Lady Helmsford's angry looks of hatred, Maud feared the worst, and *her* worst meant being abandoned to the mercy of John Langley. At these moments she regretted not having yielded to Monteiro's prayer, and even risked being his wife, rather than the horrors that awaited her were she given back to her guardian. Monteiro, or Rupert as she called him to herself, would surely have been kind and tender—perhaps he was the only true friend she had in the wide world; yet she blushed and trembled, even to shrinking, at the idea of giving herself to so great a stranger. Indeed she wondered that he was ready to link himself to one he knew so little, for her ideas of love and marriage were very sober and delicate; yet, the notion of his possible preference for the Countess gave her a keen and deadly pain.

Then again, instance after instance of her aunt's generosity and pride came to her mind, and she rejected with indignation against herself the idea of treachery being *possible* to so naturally noble a character. Yet she was very wroth at being thus a prisoner for no error deserving

punishment. She felt she could never again seek her aunt's friendship or offer her her own. It was an insult as well as an injury that could not soon be forgiven. As to Dorothy, no words could adequately express her indignation and terror. Her faith in Lady Helmsford's generosity and loyalty was considerably more limited than Maud's; but her anxiety to spare her beloved young lady as much as possible kept her unusually silent.

"Well, here is supper at last!" she exclaimed the evening of the day on which Lady Helmsford had the stormy interview above described with Monteiro. "It is not that I am so hungry as that it's something to do! Come, dear lamb! come to table, for we know not how soon it may please my lady to starve us; and I suppose Cicely there would come in just as bright and smiling to say, 'Please, madam, you are to have no more to eat,' as she does now to say, 'Please, madam, I have brought supper,'" grumbled Dorothy as she assisted to lay the cloth.

"That would I not, Mistress Dorothy," said the young girl earnestly. "I am main sorry to have to turn the key on my lady here. But what can I do! Mistress Beville says 'tis all for her good, and shall not last long."

"Ah! indeed, Cicely, you are a good creature," quoth Dorothy. "Now, what's to prevent you letting me have a bit of a turn just for the good of my health?"

In truth, poor Dorothy was feverishly anxious to communicate with Monteiro, in whom, as by instinct, she put her trust as being able and willing to deliver her mistress.

"I can't, indeed I can't!" exclaimed Cicely, almost in tears. "Mistress Beville sits atop of the first flight of stairs, waiting for the key, and I dare not let you out."

"The devil fly away with Mistress Beville!" ejaculated Dorothy. "Ah! what are we shut up for at all? Anyhow, Cicely, tell us the news."

"Indeed, Mistress Dorothy, there is none. The house is like the dead! My lady is not well. No visitors are let in—so Master Hobson says; and Mistress Beville desired me to tell you, you are to pack up Mistress Maud's

mails, for my lady talks of starting for France the day after to-morrow !”

“Indeed !” cried Maud, joining the conversation for the first time. “This is somewhat unexpected !”

“No, madam ; preparations have been made for the last few days.”

“Tell me,” asked Maud, much distressed by this intelligence, “do you know if the King has arrived ?”

“He hath, madam ! He arrived the day before yesterday, I believe. Did you not hear the bells a-ringing ?”

“’Tis strange no word has been sent me. Stay, good Cicely ! It will not bring you into mischief to take a note from me to my aunt ?”

“Surely not, sweet lady ! Any ways I will do your bidding.”

Maud wrote a few lines, urgently imploring to see and speak with Lady Helmsford ; and Cicely readily took charge of them.

When she returned to remove their supper things however, she only brought a verbal message that the Countess would reply presently.

“It is all oppressively strange,” said Maud when she was once more alone with Dorothy. “Why should my aunt hurry me away just when the King returns ? Why does M. di Monteiro make no sign ? I seem suddenly cut off from help at the very crisis of my fate.”

“And I shut up like a malefactor, or I’d soon know the whys and wherefores !” cried Dorothy, wringing her hands distractedly. “I’ll go bail Master Monteiro has been here, and not let come near ye ! Ah ! what has happened to my lady, to make her like a raging lion ?”

“I cannot tell ; but oh, Dorothy ! I feel we are in a sad plight,” exclaimed Maud. And wearied and worn out, exhausted by her own fruitless, endless conjectures, and debilitated by her imprisonment and want of fresh air, the poor girl sank on her knees by Dorothy’s side, and hiding her face in her humble friend’s lap, burst into an unusual fit of crying.

“Husht ! husht, me honeybird !” said the good woman, *fairly at her wit’s end* to soothe her beloved mistress, and

to conceal her own increasing fears. "If I could but get word of that illegant gentleman, Master Monteiro. See now, my darling ! if I can get out any way to-morrow, may I go and speak to him ?"

"Yes, yes, Dorothy ! Anything rather than this terrible uncertainty."

"I wonder if that little black creature is sent to the right about like poor Chifferil ? I think he must be ! As sure as he was roaming the house, he would have been thrusting in his little black head under the tea-tray or Cicely's arm !"

"Surely Lady Helmsford would never send him away ?"

In somewhat disjointed and aimless talk, with frequent long pauses, the evening wore away, Dorothy's evident depression weighing heavily on her mistress. Just before they retired for the night, Mistress Beville herself brought a short note, written in evident haste and uneasiness, and signed E. Helmsford. "I, too, am anxious to see you. To-morrow, between twelve and one, I shall visit you. We can then arrange our future plans."

"Pray thank Lady Helmsford for me," cried Maud. "Say I await her with impatience."

"And an illegant story it will be for my lady, the Baroness Langdale, to tell at Court, how she was locked up by her own aunt, and Mistress Beville the jailer !" said Dorothy, with a curtsy.

"We have good reasons for what we do," quoth Beville, with an imperturbable air. "And mayhap your lady will thank us yet. I wish you good-evening, madam."

"Well, dear Dorothy," exclaimed Maud, as Beville closed and locked the door, "this looks well. At last I shall see my aunt ! Perhaps she has some better reason than we wot of for mewing me up thus."

"There's neither better nor best in it at all," said Dorothy sententiously ; "only bad and worse."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT cock-crow next morning, Maud and her faithful nurse were awoke by the sounds of movement in the house—the hauling to and fro as of boxes and packages, the tramp of feet. Their breakfast was brought by a young woman Maud had never seen before, and who replied to Dorothy's eager queries by saying shortly, that the noise and disturbance was caused by preparations for the departure of Mistress Sparrow with Mab and Tab, and the greater portion of my lady's luggage, as she was to precede my lady by a day or two on their journey to the coast.

Although disturbed by this intelligence, Maud still believed that all would be satisfactorily explained by Lady Helmsford in their fast approaching interview; yet her heart sank as the hour appointed drew near.

"You must stay in the room unless my aunt desires you to leave it," said Maud to her ally.

"To be sure I will; and if I go, I'll not go far," with a knowing look at the door leading to their bed-chamber.

Almost before the appointed hour the key turned in the lock, and Lady Helmsford entered, with a quick, firm step. She was in full morning dress—a sacque of crimson and black brocade, a dark green lutestring petticoat, a Mechlin lace cap and lappets; her cheeks brilliant with rouge; her eyes sparkling with almost metallic brightness.

"I suppose I am in deepest disgrace for thus incarcerating you, Maud! However, you will understand my motives better by-and-by." She smiled a curious hard, sneering smile—a smile that completed the uneasiness with which her look, and voice, and manner inspired her niece.

"Madam, I am deeply indignant at being thus arbitrarily imprisoned for no fault that I am aware of. I have also suffered great anxiety as to what is to become of me. *Speak, I pray you! Are you going to start for France, and leave me—to my fate?*"

"I give you your choice, Maud. Come with me, and you shall have much pleasure ; or stay to know the upshot of your suit to the King."

"But, madam, with whom am I to remain? I know no protector save yourself, who seem to renounce me. I am, of course, desirous to know when Don Juan di Monteiro is to see His Majesty, and to learn the result of the interview."

"And I leave for France to-morrow morning. I have urgent reasons for not delaying my journey. Pooh, child ! come with me ! ten to one if your suit prospers."

"How?" cried Maud, stepping back with much surprise ; "'tis scarce a week since you spoke of my claims as certain to be acknowledged."

"Much has happened to change my views," returned Lady Helmsford moodily. "However, if you are resolved to stay, there is this empty house at your service ; or you can seek sanctuary with your excellent guardian."

"You mock me !" said Maud, the tears springing to her eyes at these words, and the tone in which they were spoken. "One would be as bad as the other. You gone, I should not be left a free agent for twenty-four hours."

"Nay ! scarce for twenty-four hours," remarked the Countess dryly.

"Ah, madam !" cried Maud, clasping her hands, and drawing nearer, "I am very friendless ; do not desert me ! If I have offended, 'twas in ignorance ; surely I have not erred past forgiveness !"

"Sure, mee lady, you'd never go for to forsake your 's only child !" exclaimed Dorothy, in a voice that was edged with rage and fear.

"Nonsense, woman !" said Lady Helmsford, turning on her heel, a gleam of fury shining out from behind the calmness which she had composed her face.

"I have yet an alternative," she went on, in a carefully-modulated tone in which she had never spoken ; "one which you will perhaps prefer. Don Juan di Monteiro visited me yesterday, and, on hear-

ing my plans, informed me he had provided a safe and honorable asylum with some friends of his own."

While she spoke a deep blush spread over Maud's cheek.

"Indeed, madam, he is most considerate ! But—but would you not postpone your journey a day or two rather than throw me on the protection of a gentleman who has already shown me so much generosity ? Situated as I am, I would fain avoid further obligations to him."

Maud spoke imploringly.

"I doubt not he will induce you to repay him amply," said Lady Helmsford, with a harsh laugh. "No, Mistress Langley, circumstances, compared to which your delicate scruples are of small account, oblige me to leave London to-morrow."

Maud's countenance fell, the color faded from her face.

"Well ! I'm sure my young lady would be safe and well enough with any friend Mr. Monteiro recommends," quoth Dorothy, who, by some not very clear line of reasoning, or more probably some instinctive impulse, had energetically adopted Monteiro's side.

The Countess did not heed her.

"And where does Don Monteiro design to place me ?" asked Maud, with quivering lips, and by a strong effort holding back the tears which pride would not allow her to shed.

"That I cannot tell," returned Lady Helmsford. "In short, Don Juan spoke rudely and unadvisedly, seeming sure of seeing the King to-morrow or next day ; certain of success, and therefore insolent. We parted angrily. But I will send and ask him where he means to bestow you, and say you had better be removed to-day."

"To-day, madam !" said Maud faintly, clasping her hands.

The Countess looked at her scornfully.

"So you are reluctant to meet your husband," she said ; "the husband you will neither accept nor renounce. Once more I offer the choice : accompany me, or stay with him !"

Something she could not define of hatred and scorn in

Lady Helmsford's voice and manner chilled and revolted Maud.

"I have decided, madam," she exclaimed quickly. "Heaven forbid I trespassed for an unnecessary hour on protection reluctantly extended. Ascertain where Don Juan di Monteiro means to bestow me, and I will relieve you of my presence."

The Countess kept silence for a moment, gazing fixedly at her niece.

"It is well," she said at last slowly; "write to your obliging bridegroom, and I will send your billet. I am somewhat surprised he has not already been here. Has your woman packed your boxes?"

"Partly, my lady," answered Dorothy, who felt unspeakably anxious to see her mistress safe out of Lady Helmsford's hands, for that lady's altered manner impressed her painfully. "Half an hour will finish them, and, my lady, if you like I can take my lady's—my young lady's message to the gentleman."

A curious sardonic smile curled Lady Helmsford's lip. "You are a prudent woman, and a faithful follower, Mistress Dorothy," she said; "it shall be as you propose."

"Barring I don't know the way," returned Dorothy, ruefully rubbing her nose.

"Oh, we can supply a guide. Well, then, *dear* niece, write your billet; in half an hour I shall desire one of the men to be ready to lead your woman to the Don's lodgings."

"Ah! my aunt," cried Maud, stung by the tone in which the Countess had said "*dear* niece," and seeing that she turned as if to leave the room—"do not go thus; although you are cruel now, you *have* been good and generous! I have never knowingly done aught to merit your anger. Why—why are you so bitter?"

"Bitter—I am tenderness itself compared to the bitter cup of duplicity and ingratitude *you* have held to my lips! What glamour have you thrown over Juan di Monteiro to make him false as yourself?"

"Nay, you are indeed unjust," cried Maud. "I cannot prevent Monsieur di Monteiro's fancy or prepossession—or what you will. I have done my best to repress it,

believe me ; and perhaps, after he has accomplished his friendly mission, we may never meet again."

"How dare you mock me with so monstrous a falsehood ! you value Juan's love so lightly, that you care only to repress it ? Girl ! the very way, in which you hesitate to throw yourself on your lover's protection, proves you fear your own heart ! Before a week is over you will be his, and then you will learn how much of truth or tenderness a man like Monteiro has for a woman he can legally claim !"

The suppressed fury of Lady Helmsford's tones made her hearers shiver ; as she ceased speaking she turned away, and left the room rapidly—not forgetting, however, to turn the key, after closing the door with some violence behind her.

"Don't you shake and tremble so, mavourneen," cried Dorothy, clasping her young mistress in her arms. "Keep up your heart ; if you lose courage now, you may lose everything !"

"But, Dorothy," clinging to her and scarce able to subdue the shivering that shook her frame, "what has turned Lady Helmsford so cruelly against me ? what *have* I done ?"

"Faith, the worst thing one woman could do to another ? You have taken the man she doted on from her."

"I cannot bear to think it !"

"Ah ! never you mind ! my lady is one of those that don't stick at a trifle, and have their little fancies. The Spanish gentleman has just shown her he cares more for the tie of your slipper than the best kiss *she* could give him ! I'll thank God and the blessed saints when you are safe out of the house, mee jewel ! Let me go pack the mails, while you write. Ah ! I wish that civil-spoken gentleman was English, and—"

"He is, Dorothy," interrupted Maud, still clasping her good friend, and impelled by a true instinct to trust her with Monteiro's secret. "Never breathe what I am about to say. But he is English, and of my own blood ; he is *Rupert Langley*, my father's first cousin, and his errand *in London* is to save me from my uncle."

"Oh! blessed hour! You don't mean it! Are ye sure, mee darling?"

"I am, dear nurse! he holds letters from my father. He knows the family history! I am *quite* sure!"

"Then I will go seek him with a heart and a half—does my lady know this?"

"No, Dorothy! and you must guard the secret!"

"I will so! Faith, all will go right now! Here's the pen and paper, mavourneen!"

"No, Dorothy! I cannot write to my kinsman. He knows you; a message will do as well. Tell him all my aunt says (I mean of her departure), and the necessity of my seeking shelter elsewhere; beg him to believe it is my only chance of escaping John Langley."

"Lave it all to me," returned Dorothy, with her head in a box. "I'll speak to him, never fear!"

Within the specified half-hour Mistress Beville made her appearance. "Mistress Dorothy," she said, "if you are ready, my lady says there is a coach at the door to take you on your errand."

"I'll come in ten minutes," replied Dorothy, rising from her knees.

"Are Mistress Langley's packages ready?"

"All but turning the keys, which I'm sure, if there is any good in practice, you're equal to do!" returned Dorothy with a sneer.

"You will come down, then, when you are ready," said Beville, unmoved, and left the room, wonderful to relate, without locking the door after her.

"Well, well," exclaimed Dorothy, who was tying on her hood, and otherwise preparing to go out; "our troubles are nearly over; won't I get a hearty welcome where I am going? No matter."

"And you will come back as soon as ever you can! Dear kind Dorothy," cried Maud, kissing and clinging to her, "I cannot tell you the sort of despair I feel at letting you go even for an hour! Come back quickly! and no matter how humble the shelter my—my—cousin has found for me, I will gladly abide there."

"Just lave it all to me, and keep up your heart. Y\\

come back as quick as ever I can ! and I'll go bail mee gentleman will come fetch you himself," added Dorothy, with a knowing nod.

"No, no ! I would much rather not. I would, indeed," repeated Maud, following her to the door.

The time that ensued wore on heavily and nervously for Maud, who strove to employ herself by looking into the various drawers and wardrobes, and adding any stray forgotten articles she found therein to the mails already filled by Dorothy's dexterous hands, and then crouching on a footstool over the embers of the decaying fire, she waited, in an anxious, yet dreamy state of mind, for her nurse's return.

Meantime, when Dorothy descended, she met Mistress Letitia Sparrow in the hall, who expressed much pleasure at having an opportunity of bidding her adieu.

"Ah ! will you try to go up and stay a while with mee poor darlin' young lady ? I know she'll be fretting all alone by herself there ; and I'll be back soon."

"I will try, good Mistress Dorothy, but indeed I dare not promise. I am sure I know not what is come to the house, everything seems topsy-turvy ! My lady is that strange—so hurried with her preparations one minute, and ready to put them aside the next. Is Mistress Langley coming with us to Paris ?"

"How can I—" began Dorothy, when she was cut short by the sharp accents of Beville.

"Mistress Sparrow," they called out, "my lady asks for you, you had better come at once."

Mistress Sparrow hurried away. The porter threw wide the door, a hackney coach stood at the entrance, a respectable-looking serving-man in plain livery (but not my lady's colors) held the coach door open.

"You are to take me to Don Monteiro's lodgings," said Dorothy, with what she considered an imposing air.

"Do you know where he lives ?"

"Yes, madam," he replied respectfully.

"Well, go the shortest way," remarked Dorothy, stepping into the vehicle. The man mounted beside the coachman, who drove off directly at a pretty good pace.

As the coach turned into Charles Street, D'Arcy entered the square from Pall Mall.

Monteiro, although fully believing the Countess's professions of partial reconciliation and good faith, and determined to keep his promise not to interfere with her, even by a visit of inquiry during the day that intervened between their last interview and his anticipated presentation to the King, could not subdue an uneasy feeling which induced him to send D'Arcy with polite inquiries as to Lady Helmsford's health, and directions to pick up any stray information he could without point-blank interrogations. Above all, he was not to ask for Gomez, though he might speak to him if he happened to be in the hall. Thus warned, D'Arcy approached the enemy.

"Her ladyship is better this morning," was the porter's reply to D'Arcy's queries; "but too unwell and too much occupied to see any one."

"Ay! just so," said D'Arcy. "And Mistress Langley and the rest?"

"Mistress Langley has not been downstairs or out for a long time; but her woman has just now gone forth to shop or some such thing. I heard her tell Mistress Sparrow as she went by, that her mistress would be lonesome while she was out, but that she would be back soon."

"Oh! what a grand place you have here! No end of company too, I suppose."

"Not for the last few days; it has been like a city of the dead! Don Juan di Monteiro was here about this time yesterday, and by my troth! not a soul, gentle or simple, has crossed the threshold since! I don't know when such a thing happened before; and my lady never left her own apartments since the day before yesterday."

"Faith, she must be mighty ill," observed D'Arcy; "and when does she start for Paris?"

"I do not know—I don't think the day is fixed yet."

"Well, I will not trouble you any more. Good-day to you," and D'Arcy stalked back to give a faithful report of this conversation, from which Monteiro derived great satisfaction.

If Dorothy, the devoted Dorothy, was going out freely

and contentedly on some small mission, all was well. She would not quit her beloved mistress even for an hour, were she not convinced of her safety. Her speech with Mistress Sparrow also showed a relaxation of the Lady Helmsford's wrath and severity. So with his apprehensions set at rest, Monteiro prepared for the event of to-morrow.

While Monteiro thus consoled himself, time went on slowly for poor Maud. About an hour and a half after Dorothy had left dinner was brought in, and Maud had hardly finished the pretense of eating it when Mistress Sparrow made her appearance.

It seemed so long since the poor little *dame de compagnie* had paid her a visit, and the sight of a friendly face was so welcome in her solitude, that Maud, yielding to her kindly impulse, kissed the well-rouged cheek with due caution.

"I am so glad to see you, Mistress Sparrow ; and my good Dorothy has left me for a while, but I marvel she is not back again."

"Indeed, my dear young lady, I should have come to visit you before had I not been strictly forbidden. I grieve to see you so pallid ; but the charming air of *la belle France* will soon bring back your roses. You accompany us, do you not ?"

"No, good Mistress Sparrow, I think not !"

"Dear, dear ! then I must say adieu now, for I leave immediately. Ah me ! but I am sorry to bid you good-bye ! you have ever been so kind and gentle." The tears stood in poor Letitia's eyes as she spoke.

"I trust we shall meet again," said Maud, tenderly taking her hand.

"But I am forgetting myself," cried Mistress Sparrow, with a sudden start. "My lady has sent me to fetch you ; she has a message, I think, from Mistress Dorothy."

"Indeed ! Oh, let us go to her at once ; 'tis strange though that Dorothy has not returned."

So saying, Maud followed Mistress Sparrow, and soon

outstripped her in her half-fearful curiosity and eagerness.

"My lady is in her study," cried Letitia.

Maud tapped at the door.

"Come in," said the Countess. She was sitting at her writing-table looking at a piece of rather crumpled paper, on which several lines were traced. "This is from your woman," she said, as Maud entered and stood before her. "She writes—'I have seen Master di Monteiro, he is much engaged or would bear this himself. This is a proper place, the house of a respectable Spaniard, whose wife is English. I stay to make all ready and to receive my young mistress when it pleases her to come.—I am your ladyship's obedient servant, Dorothy.' There," concluded Lady Helmsford, handing her the paper, "I suppose you know your woman's writing?"

"I can scarce say I do; but she *can* write. I think she has found some one to write for her—see what a scrawl her name is compared to the rest. But I am right glad she has found a refuge for me. I would fain go there as soon as possible, and so relieve your ladyship of a troublesome charge."

"'Tis best so," returned Lady Helmsford, who spoke more gently than when Maud saw her a couple of hours before, and looked down upon her blotting-book while she spoke. "See, the letter is dated from 'Bow Street,' a respectable place enough, though scarce in the repute it once had. Still—" she hesitated; Maud preserved a respectful silence. "I know what will be the best plan," resumed the Countess, with a sort of effort, and slowly raising her eyes till they met those of her niece. "Sparrow will start with some of the baggage almost directly. She can take you *en route*, and see you safely to your destination."

"'Tis well thought of, madam," said Maud gladly.

"Go, then, and make your preparations," returned the Countess, again averting her eyes. "I will give directions to my people—and—and—I will see you ere you start."

Mistress Sparrow, who had entered with Maud, but

stood respectfully in the background, made a little step forward with a pleased expression on her countenance : " Yes, Sparrow, go with Mistress Langley ; assist her to dress. Go ! "

Lady Helmsford waved them away somewhat impatiently.

" Nay ! I am indeed fortunate to have a little more of your company," quoth Letitia, as they re-entered Maud's sitting-room, where they found one of the footmen already removing the boxes which Dorothy had packed.

" I wish you were to be with us, my dear young lady ; and methinks, from her looks and tones, my lady the Countess is grieved to part with you ! "

" And perhaps, also, for treating me so ill," replied Maud. " Ah, Mistress Sparrow ! how near I have been to loving my aunt ; she is so grand and beautiful ! Why has she been so cruel and unjust, and thrust me from her ? "

" She is hard to deal with at times ! Still a grand lady to serve. I could scarce find such a home elsewhere. The world is a cold place, dear Mistress Langley, to an unprovided gentlewoman like myself ; therefore, if I seem somewhat subservient to my lady at times, you must not despise me ! "

" God forbid ! " said Maud gently. " Why should I wish you to contradict my aunt ? but I must find my hat and cloak. "

Mistress Sparrow gladly assisted in the operation of attiring the young lady, who soon donned her black silk furbelowed scarf, and small hat, tied with violet ribbon and decorated with velvet pansies ; drawing on her well-fitting many-buttoned gray gloves, and laying her cardinal cloak ready to wrap round her, for the days were yet chill, she declared herself ready. Mistress Sparrow went to seek her outdoor garments, and Maud stood by the fireplace gazing at the room which had been her home for nearly three months, and from which she was going forth into an unknown world.

What alternations of hope and fear she had experienced *there* ! what sharp pain and disappointment, with faint

trembling gleams of half-dreaded sweetness, when she thought of Rupert her cousin—her avowed lover, whom she at once feared yet trusted ! Young and unlearned in life's bitter lore as she was, she felt that his love for her was the cause of her aunt's harshness ; but if Rupert had been false to Lady Helmsford, how could she trust him ? Might not the Countess have been misled by her own fancy, her own imperious will ? Monteiro or Rupert could not be false !—impetuous, hasty, over-bold, perhaps, but not false ; his frank clear eyes seemed to smile upon her as she thought. Moreover, her sound natural sense suggested that had there been any baseness, of which Lady Helmsford could with a shadow of truth accuse him, she would have done so. What she had said was formless and vague. But Maud scarce acknowledged to her heart how disappointed she felt that Monteiro had not come himself to escort her to the asylum he had provided. She had at first shrunk from the embarrassment of leaving her aunt's house under his protection ; but now it seemed unkind of him not to come. On the whole, however, she felt more hopeful and at rest than she had done for many days, and was quite satisfied when Mistress Sparrow again summoned her to bid farewell to her prison.

"The coach waits," said the *dame de compagnie* ; "it is full time I were on my road."

Maud therefore, mindful of Lady Helmsford's wish to see her once more, descended to the dressing-room, where she found her aunt standing near the windows, as if arrested in pacing to and fro.

"I come to bid you adieu, madam," said Maud, in unsteady accents, seeing her aunt kept silence. The idea of parting in this cold unfriendly manner affected her keenly ; still the Countess does not speak. "You have been most generous to me, you afforded me help in time of sore need ; and if you now show me a harsher mood, believe me when I am away I will only remember your happier aspect with gratitude. Give me your hand before I go."

"Do not ask me, Maud !" exclaimed Lady Helmsford

in a curious smothered voice. "I cannot now—but—but, child, hereafter—if you are in difficulties, if he who will be your husband ill-treats you, come to me, and I will aid you to the utmost of my power. Remember this, Maud!"

"Indeed, madam; I hope I may never be driven to so sad a strait."

"Nevertheless, *remember*," repeated Lady Helmsford. "Now, go; Sparrow should have been on the road more than an hour ago; go!"

Thus repulsed, Maud curtsied obediently, though much struck by her aunt's tone, and withdrew.

In the hall was some disorder and litter of straw, as if packages had been carried through; and at the door stood a large carriage, laden with luggage, to which were attached four post-horses. Everything being ready, directly Maud and Mistress Sparrow took their places therein, and a sober elderly man—the "*locum tenens*," Letitia whispered, for Chifferil—with bows and apologies, followed them, the lumbering vehicle was put in motion, and started at a tolerable pace, making for the direction of Long Acre, whereat Mistress Sparrow expressed her gratification, as the condition of the Strand was such that she declared it inevitably entailed sore bones to travel along it. "'Tis also the best way to Bow Street," she added, and then proceeded to chatter volubly about her regret to part with Mistress Langley; of the princely grandeur in which my lady the Countess traveled, always with three carriages, which necessitated the dispatch of a part of the retinue a day in advance, by reason of difficulties connected with a supply of post-horses, etc., etc. Maud was thankful to be spared the trouble of answering; lost in her own thoughts, which her parting with her aunt rendered both sad and troubled, she did not give much heed to the streets they passed, and in her ignorance of the great capital could form no idea of the distance or position of the place to which they were journeying.

At length the motion of the carriage and the clatter of Letitia's tongue ceased together. Maud looked up. The

coach had stopped in a grave-looking street, opposite a solemn mansion of red brick, with stone copings—a house that seemed in some odd way known to her.

“Why! what are they stopping for?” cried Letitia; “this is Great Queen Street.”

“By her ladyship’s commands,” said the new secretary, who had not hitherto spoken.

A sudden terror fell on Maud; the next instant the house-door flew open, and she beheld a respectable solid-looking serving-man, and beyond him, standing bare-headed in the entrance, as though at home, her uncle, John Langley, with a grim smile on his countenance. Maud’s heart seemed to die within her.

“There must be some mistake,” she said with white trembling lips. “Lady Helmsford desired that I should be conveyed to Bow Street where my woman Dorothy awaits me.”

“Pardon me, madam,” replied the secretary, who had already alighted, “the last order from the Countess was to place you under the care of your good guardian there.”

Mistress Sparrow burst into violent weeping.

“I knew naught of it, believe me! I knew naught,” she repeated.

“’Tis indeed the cruelest treachery,” cried Maud, indignation mastering fear for the moment. “I will not leave the coach! Surely I am a free agent. I demand to be taken—”

The words died on her lips. To whom could she go? She feared to name Monteiro lest she might bring him into danger, and even if she had, would it avail? Ah, why, why was he not there to shield her? Had *he*, too, forsaken her?

“Scarcely a free agent while under age, fair niece,” said Langley, stepping forward and holding out his hand with ceremonious politeness to assist her in alighting. “Be advised; your noble aunt restores you to my custody, and I am determined you shall return to my house. Make no unseemly resistance, ’twill but make matters worse. What is the will of one feeble, peevish girl against mine?”

Maud's pride enabled her to suppress an impulse to scream aloud in her hopeless anguish. She had a dim feeling that her guardian might gloat over an impotent resistance, her sensitive delicacy shrank from the possibility that rude hands might touch her—all this, and much more, flashed along the electric lines of thought even while her uncle spoke. Yes! the only course left to her weakness was submission, and then she would see Dorothy, who was no doubt entrapped like herself.

When Langley ceased speaking, a moment's dead silence fell upon them all, broken only by poor Letitia's sobs.

"You are within your rights," said Maud at length, very distinctly and calmly, calm with the stillness of despair, while she turned deadly white. "I will descend." Then turning to Mistress Sparrow she pressed her hand. "I in nowise blame you," she said aloud; then, stooping as though to kiss her cheek, whispered, "For God's sake contrive to let Don Monteiro know—he lodges in Salisbury Street, Strand—for God's sake!"

"I will, I will!" muttered the terrified afflicted *dame de compagnie*.

Maud, again pressing her hand, stepped lightly from the carriage without touching her uncle's outstretched arm.

The servant threw open the dining-room door, and Maud walked mechanically into that dreary apartment.

In a minute or two she heard the rumble of the coach as it drove away, and felt herself doomed and powerless; the next, John Langley entered and stood face to face with his niece.

Maud Langley was a woman of no common character, and it was rapidly developing. Under a soft, tender, beauty-loving, restful surface, lay a store of courage, of common sense, of readiness to make the best of things, of purest loyalty; and with these the blessed gift of self-control, the power to mask her feelings, with which merciful nature, by her admirable system of compensations, arms the weaker sex. And now, though dizzy with this sudden revelation of her aunt's black treachery, she strove,

with all the mental force she could rally, to understand and grapple with her position. She looked fully, but not defiantly into her guardian's eyes till, with a curious sense of humiliation, he averted his ; and forced by her silence into speech, he said :

" 'Tis to be regretted, young mistress, that your reluctance to return to the shelter of your guardian's roof necessitated something of stratagem."

"Now I *am* here, sir, what is your will respecting me?"

"Listen, Maud," he returned, trying with small success to speak pleasantly ; "I wish to deal kindly and fairly by you ! I am vexed and wounded by your determined rejection of my son ; but I am resolved not to force you into a marriage which might embitter his life. He does not share my views—the foolish boy is infatuated by you ! He has been sick to death from this silly passion. I have therefore removed him, lest he might annoy you. He is now far away ; to-morrow I intend to send you under safe escort to Langdale. I cannot myself accompany you, as I have business in another direction ; but so far as in me lies I shall prevent Harold having access to, or in any way molesting you. I wonder he hath not more pride than to persevere in spite of so many rebuffs."

"If such are your intentions, sir," said Maud, still looking very keenly at him, "you leave me no cause for wishing to quit your care—at any rate for the present ! I regret to hear my cousin is still indisposed, although I do not for a moment believe that I have any share in causing his suffering—on this point either you deceive yourself, or *he* deceives you."

"Had my Lady Helmsford been faithful to her engagement, and truly favored Harold's suit, instead of permitting every honey-tongued, empty-headed fine gentleman of her following access to you, you would have thought more favorably of Harold's suit ; but it is useless and unworthy of repine, though I marvel that a young woman, in some ways sufficiently sensible, cannot see the advantages of such a union !"

In fact Langley was much relieved by his niece's acqui-

escence. Outcries and a scene, such as he had anticipated, would have created an enormous scandal, and thus temporarily gratified, he told himself that his feelings towards his niece would have been friendly—nay, fatherly—had she not been contumacious, contemptuous, and irreligiously rebellious, in that she dared to cross his will and upset the plan he had so admirably arranged for his own and his son's benefit.

"Let us say no more on the subject," returned Maud. "Permit me to go to my own room, where I suppose I shall find my good Dorothy."

She longed to be free from the presence of one she at once feared and despised.

"Your former apartment is prepared for you; but Mistress Dorothy is not here—she did not accompany you?"

At this further evidence of a deep-laid plot Maud's courage and composure almost failed.

"Where—where can poor Dorothy be?" she exclaimed. "What terror she must be in, separated from me in this great, awful city! Ah! my uncle! do send for her—do find her!"

"Well, niece!" replied Langley with a grim smile, "how came you to part with this valued attendant?"

Maud paused for a moment of rapid thought. How much did her uncle know of Monteiro's scheme? at any rate she must not admit too much.

"Lady Helmsford sent her on an errand," she said faintly. Again the grim smile passed over Langley's face, this time tinged with triumph.

"I know the errand, mistress," he said dryly; "my Lady Helmsford was good enough to confide to me some of the difficulties she has had to contend with concerning you—and the bold pretension of this Spanish adventurer was no trifling matter! She should never have exposed you to his advances! However, you will see *him* no more, *that* I am resolved. Strange, that you should be more inclined to favor one so utterly unknown than a kinsman!"

These last words showed Maud that, at least, the truth

of Monteiro's lineage was unknown ; she felt that her own danger and difficulty would be increased were she to reveal it, apart from the deadly hatred to which she would expose him.

"Then what has become of Dorothy ? I am sure, sir, you know ! do, I beseech you, restore her to me !"

"I will," replied Langley, with a slight bow or bend of the head, intending to show extreme graciousness. "I have arranged that she shall join you to-morrow evening at the first stage of your journey to Langdale ; does that content you, fair mistress ?"

"It must," replied Maud coldly. "Now may I seek my own room ?"

"Certainly ! You will there find the attendant I have provided. I hope for the pleasure of your company at dinner ?"

"I have dined," said Maud ; "and my company would give you but scant pleasure ; suffer me to remain in my chamber ?"

To this Langley thought it best to agree, and Maud, at last, escaped. A staid but stern-looking female received her with a respectful curtsy, but met the anxious, entreating glance which the young lady cast upon her with a fixed and threatening eye, expressive of the unfriendly watchfulness wherewith the keepers of the insane cow their charges ; there was nothing to be hoped from her—she was an enemy to be guarded against.

Maud mechanically laid aside her outdoor wraps, accepting the help of her uncongenial attendant ; then, with another look at her face, she tried what speech would do to break the spell the woman's presence seemed to work upon her.

"Are you to accompany me on my journey to-morrow ?"

"I believe so, madam."

"At what hour are we to set out ?"

"I know not, madam," very stiffly conveying "I will not tell."

Maud felt there was nothing to be won from her.

"I am somewhat weary and indisposed," she said; "I want nothing more—you may leave me."

"That I must not, madam. I have Mr. Langley's commands not to lose sight of you, till you are safe in the hands of your own woman."

"It is useless to dispute his will now," returned Maud quietly, though her heart beat fast with increasing fear and anger at this indication of the tenacious grasp he had laid upon her. "May I have a book to pass the weary hours till 'tis time to sleep?"

The woman rang, and another younger person, whom Maud remembered when she had before been imprisoned in the same somber apartments, came at the summons.

"Good-day to you, Susan," said Maud, with her usual kindly courtesy.

"I am main glad to see your ladyship," replied the woman cordially, and dropping a curtsy.

"You must speak to me, not to Mistress Langley," said Maud's keeper. "The young lady asks for a book. Do you wish any particular book, madam?"

"No—anything Mr. Langley chooses."

Susan disappeared, and soon returned with a volume of "Waller's Poems." With this in her hand to serve as a shelter to her face, Maud settled herself in an un-easy chair, and gave herself up to intense, though unconnected thought.

She was indeed entrapped. Her one chance of deliverance lay in poor Mistress Sparrow! of her good-will Maud never doubted; but she was timid, and not very clear-headed; was she capable of conveying a warning to Monteiro? and, even if she did, how would he contrive to liberate her? This last question, however, did not trouble her much; she felt sure he would manage to set her free. How could Lady Helmsford have been so cruelly treacherous—so regardless of all womanly sympathy! The tears coursed plentifully down Maud's cheeks and fell on her book, as she thought of her kinswoman's baseness—of her own isolated, forlorn condition! Her *only friend* on earth, beside her poor, helpless, lost Dorothy, was Monteiro; and towards him she felt, at any

rate, complete trust, she would have gone anywhere with him ; done anything he told her, confident that he was incapable of using any opportunity save for her own advantage. But young as she was, Maud knew that if she accepted his assistance, and the necessities of her flight obliged her to remain with him alone, she would be in the eyes of the world his wife *de facto*, however chivalrous his generosity might be ; and from this tremendous decision for her whole life she still shrank, even while she thought of Monteiro with grateful tenderness, and longed with unspeakable longing to see his frank, kind face, and to feel that he stood between her and her foes. His possible entanglement with the Countess, too, seemed of less formidable proportions as Maud reflected that it was Monteiro's fidelity to herself that had no doubt drawn upon her the bitterness which prompted her aunt's cruelty. But how fatal it all was ! How much of John Langley's protestations dare she believe ? and poor, dear Dorothy ! what misery and agony was she not now enduring ! and would she indeed find her on her way to Langdale ?

It was hard, with all these thoughts crowding and jostling each other in her strained heart and busy brain, to keep up the semblance of reading, and suppress the uneasiness that urged her to rise and pace the room, to look from the window, and see, like Sister Ann, if there was any one coming.

But she strove to control herself, she formed earnest inarticulate prayers in her heart, as she counted the hours and half-hours that chimed from some neighboring church, and waited and waited, in sickening suspense, for the rescue she dared not despair of. Surely Rupert—her husband—would come before night !

Meantime, Mistress Mathews—the sentinel placed over Maud—sat at a respectful distance and knitted.

At seven, Susan brought supper, and, having assisted Mathews to lay it, stayed to wait upon Maud, as Mistress Mathews had her portion served upon a distant table.

Maud, hoping to keep up her own strength, and by it her courage, attempted to eat ; but revolted from food.

"Lawk, mistress !" cried Susan to Maud's jailer ;

"how deadly my young lady looks! she cannot eat a bit!"

"Fetch some wine," said Mathews, rising quickly from her supper. "Do you feel faint, madam?"

"By no means," replied Maud, struggling gallantly with the horrible sinking of the heart which oppressed her; "but I will gladly take some wine."

A glass of John Langley's famous Burgundy greatly revived her; she was even able to eat a little afterwards.

Then she resumed her watch by the fire, while Mathews nodded over her knitting, and gave frequent hints that Mistress Langley would be better abed. But they were thrown away.

Affecting deep interest in her book, Maud contrived to prolong the sitting till nearly eleven o'clock—hoping, listening, for some signs of rescue; but in vain. So at last she consented to go to bed, and, utterly exhausted, fell asleep sooner than she expected.

It was, however, but a dream-haunted slumber that fell upon her. All the terror, and pain, and indignation of the past day came back to her in the strange, distorted forms which present themselves to semi-consciousness; and then her waking was terrible.

While Maud watched, Langley was busy with his papers and calculations.

A man on horseback came to the door, and sent in word that he bore a message from Lord Berkeley. He was admitted, and stayed more than half an hour. When he departed, Mr. Langley too called for wine—a most unusual demand from him.

"I am obliged to meet my lord at a place nigh Roehampton," said Langley to his servant, as he filled his glass, "to meet him to-morrow afternoon; so I cannot accompany my niece the first stage of her journey, as I intended."

The servant merely said, "Indeed, sir!" but he thought *it passing strange* that an Admiralty messenger should be *masked*.

Soon after Langley himself retired, and silence settled down upon the house.

Next morning Maud's breakfast was served in her room, and she was informed that some time about noon they were to start on their long, toilsome journey to the South Coast. Maud thought it somewhat late; but said nothing, as every moment's delay seemed to give her a little further chance of deliverance.

But time wore on, and it was two o'clock before word was brought to Mistress Langley that all was prepared, and the carriage awaited her.

Closely followed by her duenna, she descended and found John Langley in the hall. He wore a riding-dress and boots.

"I am obliged to bid you adieu here, fair niece," he said. "Business takes me elsewhere, but I have provided for your safety."

Indeed there were two stout men well armed and on horseback, and a servant in the Langley livery on the box, besides the postilions. "You will follow the road through Chelsea to the ferry at Battersea, another coach awaits you at the farther side of the river, and there you will find your favorite, Mistress Dorothy. I am going by the Horse Ferry; ere long I hope to visit you at Langdale. Adieu then, young mistress; you may yet regret your willfulness and contradiction."

There was something painful and deadly in the sort of forced smile with which Langley spoke these words. And Maud, now plunged into the apathy of despair, not even reassured by the promise of meeting Dorothy, answered him never a word; she bent her head and let him take her cold limp hand to lead her to the carriage.

As soon as the woman called Mathews took her place beside her, the vehicle was put in motion, the armed men placed themselves on either side, and they drove slowly away into Lincoln Fields and Holborn, directing their way to Uxbridge Road.

But Maud looked from the window in vain; the road they traveled and the faces they passed were alike unknown. Overpowered by a sense of her own impotence

she leant back out of sight, and giving herself up sunk into a sort of stupor.

The houses became fewer and fewer. Long stretches of market gardens, already beginning to be a source of wealth, succeeded, a country place or two, and then wild dreary open marshy fields and utter loneliness.

"We must be near the river now, I should think," said Mistress Mathews, who had been less taciturn than on the previous day. "'Tis a rare lonesome place. I would we were at the Ferry. There, madam, I am to give over my charge of you to an attendant of your own, a Mistress Dorothy."

"Then it is true," said Maud, reviving a little. "I scarce believed Master Langley's assurances."

"True enough," repeated Mathews, looking from the window. "But goodness! heart alive! who be these men that seem drawn up to stop our way?"

Roused by this exclamation, Maud looked forth in her turn, and coming round a bend of the road on horseback, covered with horsemen's cloaks and wearing slouched hats, came three men, while a fourth followed a little way behind. "Good Lord deliver us! 'tis a party of highwaymen! I can see they are masked," continues Mathews, clutching Maud—"or, madam! is it an attempt at rescue? You know these people? You will assure them I have treated you with all kindness and respect?"

"Indeed, I do not know them—yet, pray God they may be coming to my aid!" cried Maud, her hopes once more alight, her heart beating.

"Stand and deliver!" cried one of the horsemen, dashing forward and holding a pistol to the nearest postilion's head; he and his comrade instantly drew rein, and the coach came suddenly to a standstill. At the same time the men who formed Maud's escort rode up and a sharp fight appeared to proceed; the horses wheeling and prancing, created vast clouds of dust, men shouted, pistols were fired and swords clashed, while the servant who had sat on the box descended and disappeared.

Within the carriage the two terrified women clung to

each other, both believing the attack to be an attempt at rescue; and the woman Mathews alternately implored Maud's good offices with the victors, and bewailed her probable fate if Master Langley were to believe she was privy to the plan.

Maud, her eyes hidden on her companion's shoulder, listened with mingled terror and expectation. How earnestly she hoped no one would be hurt! How ardently she thirsted for the first sound of Monteiro's voice, for Monteiro must be at the head of the party which disputed their passage.

At last one of the horsemen who had accompanied them was seen riding off at speed; and the man with whom he had been engaged, riding up to the carriage window, took off his hat:

"Be not alarmed, ladies, I beg. This is but an attempt on the part of true love to deliver captive beauty from the hands of the oppressor. We shall just turn your horses' heads in the direction of a place of safety, where all shall be explained."

He spoke in a fat jovial voice, as through a medium of mashed potatoes.

"Pray, sir," said Maud, looking up now that the fray was over, and "nobody seemed a penny the worse," "who commands this party? I would speak with your leader."

"He will present himself to you, madam, when we reach the—the abode of bliss—the Karavanseraï, whither we are about to proceed."

"And I can tell you the worshipful Mr. Langley will hang you as high as Haman for this day's work," cried the duenna; "you will do well to hide your gallows face! but I will swear to your voice any day, if so be as I can compass your punishment!"

"A thousand thanks, madam, for your friendly intentions. Here! John, Robert, Thomas! by whatever appellation you are known, mount the box once more."

So saying he reined back his horse to admit of the cumbrous vehicle turning, which was accomplished with much difficulty; and as it turned, Maud caught a glimpse

of a group of six or seven horsemen clustered together on the sward of a small common or waste, which at that point bordered the road. She scanned them eagerly, though not near enough to see their features ; none had the carriage or bearing of Monteiro. Nor would he have permitted a man like the insolent bravo who had just spoken to approach her ; but, the cautious turning having been accomplished, Maud saw no more.

The man-servant who had accompanied them from town now approached and entreated her not to be alarmed : " All will go well, madam, believe me ! I soon found 'twere best not to show fight ! "

" Ay ! so you did, I'll warrant ye for a pack of cowardly loons ! I will tell Master Langley how you quitted you of your charge," cried Mathews.

" Well, you had best hold your tongue now," returned the man, with a grin ; and mounting the coach-box once more, he spoke to the postilions, who drove on at a quick pace. Soon they diverged to a side road, narrow and rutty.

Again Maud's heart sank in despair. Was her last state to be worse than the first ? What strange, unknown country was this ? she thought, as the carriage turned and twined through rugged lanes and by-roads. Her companion was voluble in her fear and anger, but Maud was nearly speechless.

She saw by the keen, sharply bright, level sunlight, that the day was drawing to a close. She felt she was going farther and farther from human aid.

She noticed that a horseman, of a somewhat superior air, constantly rode at the off-side of the carriage ; and, although masked, there was something familiar to her in his bearing and the turn of his head.

At last the carriage stopped, a gate was opened, and in a few minutes they again drew up at the entrance of a tall, red-brick, melancholy-looking house, surrounded by fir trees and poplars. Some of the windows were stopped up, the shutters of others were closed ; altogether it looked the fitting scene for crime.

Here was evidently the end of the journey. The *postilion* on the leader dismounted, and began to remove

his saddle, and the horseman Maud had noticed followed his example, advancing hat in hand ; she observed that one arm was in a sling.

"Let me assist you to descend," he said in a voice she knew too well. "'Tis a poor place ; but you cannot doubt the heartiness of the welcome, sweet cousin."

"Harold !" she exclaimed, almost fainting ; "Harold ! why have you brought me here ?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHILE Maud waited and watched all the long dreary morning with alternations of hope and despair, Monteiro was alert. He rose at an early hour, and dispatched his valet with a note to Lady Helmsford—a few lines of polite inquiry—just to keep his mind at rest.

The Countess wrote a gracious reply. All was well, she said. John Langley had made no sign. She was hurrying her preparations, and begged he would call as soon as his interview with the King was over. This was signed his faithful friend, "E. Helmsford," and answered its object in keeping Monteiro perfectly quiet and content.

His trust in the Countess was not altogether complete, yet he credited her with too much judgment, too much regard for her own character, and too strong a dash of generosity withal, to permit of his imagining the enormous treachery of which she had been guilty. Then he had always observed a certain nobility in her pride and willfulness which blinded him to the violence of her passion, to the relentless cruelty which opposition to her will, or mortification of her vanity, might call forth.

With a mind at rest then, as regarded Maud's safety, Monteiro dressed for his presentation to the King, yet not with anticipations of uncheckered brightness. A few hours, and the difficult game he had been playing would be played out. A few hours, and in the presence of Six

Stephen Compton, of Lady Helmsford, perhaps of others, he would solemnly declare Maud Langley free of any claim on his part.

Then how would he stand? If the King were so well disposed as to accept his services, there was still a career before him; but even so, how long would it be before he should win distinction enough to entitle him—a cadet of the family—to aspire to the hand of the heiress and head of the house?

Even if Maud was inclined to be gracious, it was his bounden duty not to press his suit. "At least, I suppose so," were his concluding reflections; "though, if she smiles, I am not sure how I shall perform that part of my duty. However, she does not seem very favorably disposed towards me; though 'tis hard to say how much of what that handsome termagant, Lady Helmsford, says is worth belief. After all, love and marriage are not the only objects in life for a man of action. Let me do my devoir this day, confound John Langley, insure the safety of my sweetest, fairest cousin (I must not think of her as my bride), and then life is surely large enough to afford oblivion and an aftergrowth happiness. At any rate, unless John Langley assassinates me before this afternoon, I shall see Maud, and look into her eyes, and hear her speak, and kiss her hand—perhaps her lips. Faith! she might grant me that much for my services!" On this moment, in truth, all his expectations hinged—beyond it he did not look.

Monteiro, as was natural, was first to arrive at the old gateway, still so familiar to Londoners. He ordered the driver of his coach to draw up and wait. Nor did Sir Stephen keep him long. The handsomely appointed equipage of the accomplished Baronet stopped, and Monteiro received a cordial greeting.

"Step in, my dear sir," cried Sir Stephen. "We are in excellent time; and have you any further tidings of your fair bride? Zounds! my good Monteiro, you must by no means relinquish the vantage-ground your bold stratagem gives you."

"I shall be guided by circumstances, Sir Stephen," re-

plied Monteiro, taking his seat in the carriage, which rolled under the archway and drove in a stately fashion round the carriage sweep, stopping at one of the principal entrances. "I trust it will be convenient for you to accompany me to Lady Helmsford's residence, that I may present you to the young Baroness, after we have seen the King. Lady Helmsford leaves for Paris to-morrow or next day, and would no doubt be pleased to find her niece provided with suitable protection ere she departs."

"Yes, yes ! I will go with you ; but as to protection, take my advice—seek none beyond your own. Who so suitable a protector as her wedded husband ?"

To this Monteiro made no reply, as Sir Stephen was in the act of alighting while he spoke.

A sentinel of the Grenadier Guards was walking up and down, and several servants in the royal livery came to the door to receive the visitors, followed by an usher, who evidently knew Sir Stephen. "My Lord Sunderland and Master Craggs are even now with His Majesty ; but if you and this gentleman will follow me, you can await your turn of audience."

He led them up a wide, short flight of stairs, which Monteiro thought scarcely looked like the principal staircase of a palace. From the landing several doors opened, and, throwing one wide, their conductor led them through a room of moderate size, where a swarthy but good-looking man, in a Turkish dress and large turban, was lounging half asleep on a settee by the fire ; two pages were playing cards in a window-seat, and a couple of German lackeys were laughing and talking over a letter one seemed reading to the other.

All rose and bowed profoundly as Sir Stephen and his companion passed through to a farther apartment, the door of which was opened by the usher. Here were two or three gentlemen in clerical, civil, and military costumes, the latter garb being worn by a stout portly personage in the uniform of a commanding officer of the Hanoverian Guards.

He hailed the entrance of Sir Stephen by a loud exclamation in German and a slap on the shoulder. The

Baronet endured this rough greeting with smiling courtesies ; and the others saluted him respectfully.

After a few words, evidently questions respecting Monteiro, towards whom the officer looked with undisguised curiosity,

"Count Bernsdorf desires to be made known to you," said Sir Stephen Compton with a wave of the hand.

Monteiro returned the profound bow made him by the officer.

"Ha !" said the Count, whose English was not very good, "Monsieur di Monteiro, we have heard of you. My goot friend Sir Stephen of you speak often. Brave sailor ! but how come you, a Spaniard, to have a suit to our King ?"

"I consider myself English, as I shall explain to His Majesty, Count, and my great desire to serve in His Majesty's English army."

"Hey, would not the navy suit you better, sir ?"

"As it seems best to His Majesty," returned Monteiro, too anxious to care for talking ; and the conversation proceeded in German between Sir Stephen and the Count.

Presently a bell rang. A door opposite to that by which they entered opened, and Craggs came forth. He, too, stopped to speak to Sir Stephen, and, recognizing Monteiro, bowed to him.

"What is that picturesque Spaniard doing here ?" asked Craggs.

"He is going, with my help, to reinstate the heiress of Langdale in her rights."

"Then I bid him God speed. Fair Mistress Langley is a charming creature."

"His Majesty will receive Sir Stephen Compton and Don Juan di Monteiro," said a splendidly dressed gentleman, coming from the King's private room.

Sir Stephen stepped forward, followed by Monteiro, who all this time held a small flat parcel wrapped in an embroidered silk covering in his left hand.

Their conductor, who was a gentleman-in-waiting, closed the door behind them, and they stood before George I.

The salon into which they were ushered was large and handsome. The walls hung with portraits, amongst which Monteiro recognized Henry VII. and his bluff son ; Henry, Prince of Wales, son of James I. ; William III. ; Queen Anne ; and, over the mantelpiece, the picture of a beautiful woman which he did not recognize : it was that of the Electress Sophia, mother of the King, and not unlike him as he stood beneath it with his back to the fire.

Yet the features of the first George were strongly marked and heavy, the brow retreating, the eyes prominent, the mouth full and somewhat coarse, and the fat which loaded his chin made more remarkable by a tight cravat. The expression of the pale but not sickly-looking face was rather benevolent and not untinged by sensuality.

He was very plainly dressed in a snuff-colored suit, unadorned by lace or any other ornament, save the broad blue ribbon of the Garter across his chest. He wore a well-powdered wig, flowing in large ringlets on his shoulders, and looked infinitely less kingly than my Lord Sunderland, who stood a little apart to the right, and even less imposing than Parker, the Lord Chancellor, with whom he was conversing.

"Come here, Sir Stephen," said His Majesty good-humoredly, in French (not very fluent French). "So this is your buccaneering friend ?"

Sir Stephen bowed low. "Now very desirous to be your Majesty's true and faithful servant, if you will permit him. Allow me to present Mr. Rupert Langley, one of the Langdale family."

"He looks more like a Spaniard than an Englishman," returned the King. "Nevertheless, sir, we are willing to accept you as a loyal subject ;" at which gracious speech, and a look from Sir Stephen, Monteiro, or, as he must henceforth be called, Rupert Langley, bent his knee and kissed the King's hand. "Now I recall it," resumed His Majesty ; "the Langleys are not specially loyal !—at least not all—your brother or your cousin was expatriated, was he not ?"

"He was, your Majesty, and suffered much in conse-

quence of his unsound judgment. Had opportunity been granted him he would, I am convinced, have proved the sincerity of his conversion ; but that opportunity he missed through the loss of a pardon granted by her late gracious Majesty," replied Rupert.

Instead of a rejoinder, the King addressed himself in German to Sir Stephen Compton, who replied with a smiling aspect, as though well pleased, in the same language.

"How is it that you are so sure this pardon was granted?" asked the King, turning again to Rupert Langley.

"Because, sire, I hold it in my hand ; and I have craved the favor of obtaining access to your presence, that I might place it in your own royal hand, and implore the restoration of the lands and title of Langdale to the orphan daughter of the late lord, now a penniless dependent on the charity of her relatives."

So saying, Rupert disengaged the parchment from its covering and, bowing low, presented it to the King, who took and examined it curiously. It was not long, written in Latin, and surmounted by a number of flourishes almost artistic in their complications, while a huge green seal of soft-looking wax depended from the document by a strip of parchment.

"'Tis the great seal," said Lord Sunderland, who had approached at a motion from the King.

"See !" said His Majesty to the Lord Chancellor, "it is the signature of Bolingbroke."

"It is, I believe, sire," replied that functionary, looking keenly at the writing ; whereupon the King, turning to Sir Stephen, spoke rapidly and emphatically in German. Indeed, during the whole interview His Majesty did not speak a word of English.

After a rather lengthy reply, Sir Stephen Compton addressed Rupert :

"His Majesty is disposed to accept this document as genuine ;" then, looking to the two Ministers, added : "He desires me to repeat to you the story of its discovery," and proceeded to give the details he had already received from Rupert.

After some questioning on this score, in which the King took part, he said in French to Rupert :

"How is it, sir, that you, who profess so much readiness to enter our service, have been so lately engaged in a conspiracy against us? Scarce three years since—was it not, my lord?" (to Sunderland)—"that an attempt was made to stir up the peasantry somewhere in the South, and you tell me this gentleman and his father were concerned in it. It was discovered and frustrated, if I remember right, by another member of this Langdale family?"

"Yes, sire," replied Rupert quickly, "an active member, who lights fires in order to extinguish them! Will your Majesty suffer me to observe, that the action of my father was prompted by a personal feeling towards his old commander? It was more of devotion to England's High Admiral than rebellion against England's King which actuated him. He had long been a stranger to his country, and knew nothing of politics; for myself, whither he went, there I was bound to go also, by my duty as a son, and my fidelity as the follower of a right noble captain!"

The King smiled graciously. "It is a pity, sir, your father's loyalty was misdirected."

"It is, sire! Since those days I have lived in England and judged for myself, and whether your Majesty deigns to accept my services or no, my convictions will never permit me to draw my sword against your authority."

Monteiro, or Rupert, stepped back as he said this, with a profound bow, and then stood at his full height—a noble figure—one hand resting on his sword-hilt, the other dropped to his side; his head erect, with a bright fearless look in his eyes, as if, in spite of the profound deference good-breeding exacted, he was perfectly unabashed by the Sovereign's presence.

"I feel bound to tell your Majesty," remarked Lord Sunderland, "that if this gentleman be the son of the late Honorable Rupert Langley, formerly of the royal navy, I can furnish some proof of the sincerity of his professions. Among the papers of the conspirators lately

seized in connection with the Sheppard affair, there is a letter, signed 'Rupert Langley,' absolutely refusing to share in any attempt to foment disturbance against the present Government of the country. Moreover, it is evident that they had opened but very little of their scheme to him."

"I earnestly hope your Majesty will look favorably upon my young friend's suit," put in Sir Stephen.

"I will consider, I will consider! Now touching this pardon. It seems evident the daughter of the exiled Baron is now Baroness Langdale, and properly under your care, my Lord Chancellor. You are the legal guardian of minors."

"The young lady herself craves to be delivered from the guardianship of Mr. John Langley, who is anxious to force her into a marriage with his son," said Sir Stephen eagerly.

"There has been a strange romance respecting that young lady and her marriage," said my Lord Sunderland, and immediately plunged into the oft-told tale, to which the King listened with much interest, occasionally uttering an exclamation in German.

"This is a wondrous history, and a fitting climax to the whole," said His Majesty, when the Earl ceased speaking.

"Pardon me, sire! the climax has yet to be revealed: behold the bridegroom!" and Sir Stephen indicated Rupert Langley by a wave of the hand.

"What!" cried the King. "This young gallant? My Lord Chancellor, you must look to your authority! here are the reins seized from your hands before you can grasp them!"

"Permit me, sire, to explain," said Rupert, again stepping forward. After setting forth that it was by means of this stratagem only he could save his kinswoman from what he felt certain would be a miserable destiny, he continued: "I beg your Majesty, and you, my lords, to believe that I hold my cousin in no way bound to me. I have kept the mystery unsolved, as a defense against the schemes of Mr. John Langley. If the young lady is, by

your Majesty's gracious permission, placed under the protection of my lord the Chancellor, it only remains for me solemnly to declare her free."

"Will the demoiselle thank you for your freedom?" said the King, who seemed in a marvelously amiable mood. "I imagine she will not be ready to renounce a gallant cavalier who has done her such service!"

"Sire, that remains to be proved."

"Where is the young lady at present?" asked the Chancellor.

"Under the care of her aunt, the Countess of Helmsford," replied Sir Stephen; "but that lady sets out for Paris to-morrow or next day, and it is proposed that Mistress Langley—perhaps I should say the Baroness Langdale—should take up her abode with me and my daughter."

This arrangement found favor with the legal custodian of infants. After an animated conversation in German with Sir Stephen Compton, and some discussion in French with Sunderland, the King gave Sir Stephen his hand to kiss, as though dismissing them.

"You have His Majesty's permission to remove your kinswoman to my care," said the Baronet; "also to consider yourself attached to his service; in what capacity you shall learn hereafter."

Monteiro bowed low and, after a few words of thanks, followed Sir Stephen from the royal presence.

"I congratulate you, my young friend, on your entire success!" cried that gentleman, as they stood waiting for the carriage to draw up. "I have seldom known His Majesty so gracious or so talkative as this morning! Your story has interested him greatly!"

"You have been my good genius, Sir Stephen!" cried Rupert. "Complete your benefits by accompanying me to St. James's Square. I burn to announce the good news! and the sooner my young cousin is removed to your hospitable mansion the better."

"I am completely at your service," said the polite Baronet.

The short distance was accomplished in silence on Ru-

pert Langley's side, although Sir Stephen Compton talked amply—of his influence with the King, of the tremendous blow the whole affair would be to John Langley; but Rupert's heart was full. He was at the crisis of his fate—a few minutes more and he would stand in Maud's presence and—Lady Helmsford's.

It seemed a lifetime, that short transit; but it was past.

The coach stopped at Lady Helmsford's door.

The first glance at the unswept doorsteps, the roadway much trampled and furrowed by wheels, startled and chilled Rupert. He sprang to the ground before the gorgeous footman could disentangle himself from his fellows on the foot-board, and sounded the knocker with a will.

Two, three minutes, a century passed.

"Is the house shut up?" called Sir Stephen from the coach.

As he spoke, Rupert heard the sounds of bolts being withdrawn and chains unhooked. Then the door was opened a few inches, and the porter's face presented itself.

"What is the matter? Is my lady within?" cried Monteiro eagerly.

"Bless your heart! no, sir; she started about ten this morning for Dover," replied the man, opening the portal to its full extent, now he recognized his interrogator.

"At ten this morning?" repeated Rupert, struck with a sudden sense of treachery and evil-doing.

"What is it?" asked Sir Stephen, joining him.

"Lady Helmsford has already set out on her journey," replied Rupert. "But Mistress Langley," he continued to the porter; "is she not within?"

"No, sir, no! Mistress Langley started yesterday, between two and three o'clock, under charge of Mistress Sparrow, so as to precede her ladyship by a stage or two. They were to lie last night at Rochester." So he had heard her ladyship's new secretary say.

Rupert was struck dumb for a moment. "And Mistress Langley's woman Dorothy—did she go with her lady?"

That the man did not know. Mistress Dorothy had gone out in the forenoon yesterday, and he had not seen her since.

"Not seen her since!" repeated Rupert to himself, thinking, with a flash of bitter self-contempt, of the satisfaction he had derived from D'Arcy's report of this outgoing of Dorothy's on the previous day! Now it seemed to him but part of some infernal scheme to blind and bamboozle him.

"Then you are alone in the house?" he said aloud.

"No, your honor. Master Hobson, the butler, and his wife are left as care-takers. He is just gone forth, and charged me to keep the door barred and bolted."

"You are quite sure Mistress Langley was to travel in Mistress Sparrow's company, in advance of Lady Helmsford?" reiterated Rupert.

"So I heard them all say, sir."

"This is a very strange tale," said Sir Stephen Compton aside. "What induces the Countess to spirit off her niece thus? I have heard queer tales of my lady. Have you made love to the aunt, Monteiro, or Langley? and is jealousy of a younger rival the motor power, you scape-grace?"

"It is too serious for jesting," said Rupert sternly. "We must lose no time in overtaking the travelers. I am certain Maud has been forced away against her will!"

"But they have good four hours' start!" cried the Baronet. "They must be at Rochester by this time."

"They are heavily laden, sir. A horseman will soon come up with them. I must not ask you to join me in this chase," continued Rupert, quivering with eagerness as he spoke.

"Were it not for rheumatism—" began Sir Stephen apologetically.

"No, no, of course not," interrupted Rupert; "but may I ask you to send a couple of your servants to back me in the attempt to rescue my cousin? Their presence will prove to her that she will not be indebted to me only, but that the good and noble Mistress Compton is ready to receive her."

"I will gladly send my house-steward, who is quite confidential, and two of the men ; but where shall they find you ?"

"Oh, I will stay for them at the Tabard. I have to provide myself with horses and money, and seek my trusty friend, D'Arcy, who knows the country round London, which I do not. If your people will follow to the Tabard Inn, they will probably be before me. Let the first comers wait. There is no time to lose ! May I implore you to go straight home ?"

"I will do so without fail. I wish you God-speed, my young friend. Why do you seem so uneasy ? 'Tis an awkward *contretemps* ! but no harm can happen to the young lady."

"Heaven knows," said Rupert, a fierce look coming into his eyes ; "only God help them that do her the lightest wrong when I come to reckon with them ! This movement of Lady Helmsford is past my comprehension ; but I will not keep you, Sir Stephen. Here—a coach—some one fetch me a coach !"

"I will, your honor," cried a rough, unkempt-looking youth, who had followed Sir Stephen Compton's carriage from St. James's, perhaps in the hope of earning a few pence by helping to hold horses or run an errand, "I will !"

They had not noticed him, though he was close behind them on the door-steps.

"Go then—be quick !" exclaimed Rupert.

He turned to assist Sir Stephen into his carriage again, exhorting him to speed ; and the vehicle had hardly been put in motion, when the volunteer messenger appeared, standing on the step of a hackney coach, which clattered up to where Rupert stood revolving in his mind the most rapid mode of action. Robilliard would find him horses, and there, too, he would probably meet D'Arcy, who might follow with the steeds to his lodging, while he made some necessary change in his dress.

"Drive to Lamb's Court, Holborn, as fast as you can," he said distinctly to the driver, bestowing a small *gratuity* on the errand boy, who stood an instant pouring

forth profuse thanks, then ran violently after the carriage, jumped up behind, and rode with it till it reached Long Acre, when he let himself down and went swiftly in the direction of Great Queen Street.

Meantime Rupert Langley strove to steady his brain and order his thoughts. Perhaps the most consolatory circumstance in this curious countermarch of Lady Helmsford's was that Maud was sent away with Mistress Letitia Sparrow. From her, he firmly believed, no double dealing was to be feared. Dim possibilities of deeper treachery than the mere inconvenience of Maud's being dragged half way to Dover occurred to him as he rattled, rolled, and bumped through the devious streets which led to Holborn; but to nothing that might seriously injure Maud would the kindly, timid *dame de compagnie* lend herself. Still it was infernally annoying, and he mentally consigned the Countess to very warm quarters for her troublesome freak.

Arrived at "Lamb's," he was at once shown into Robilliard's room, and quickly told his errand.

"What does my lady the Countess mean by carrying off our young Baroness in that fashion? *Mort de ma vie!* a noble lady like her would not be in league with the scoundrels that want to snap her up! Are you *sure* she is with Lady Helmsford?"

"Don't distract me, Robilliard. She is, I am certain, with the Countess's *dame de compagnie*—a good faithful creature; but you will find me horses—stout, fleet, serviceable—I care not what price is put on them. I shall pay all and everything, once I unravel this cursed coil, if I have not a sous left! Where is D'Arcy?"

"He went hence scarce half an hour ago, to go down to your Excellency's lodgings, and hear what news you had."

"All was well till I found the young Baroness gone! for she is Baroness—Mistress of the Heritage of Langdale, Robilliard! The King confirms the pardon granted by his predecessor; but I must away, good friend! Send on the horses as fast as you can. No doubt I shall find D'Arcy awaiting me." So saying he returned to his!

coach, and drove as fast as the capabilities of the cattle would permit to his lodgings.

As he expected, he found D'Arcy passing the time with a pipe and a tankard.

Calling for his valet, Rupert proceeded rapidly to change the suit in which he had appeared at Court, and to draw on high riding-boots, explaining while he did so the necessity for following Lady Helmsford as speedily as possible.

"I count on your help, D'Arcy. Thrust a couple of pistols in your belt, man ; I scarce know what or whom we may encounter."

While he spoke, Rupert unlocked the cabinet where he kept those weapons, and bestowed a brace on his follower, setting him an example by placing another in the sash or belt he had girt over his riding-coat, attaching them to silk cords which he passed round his neck, buccaneer fashion, to avoid losing them in a *mêlée*.

"Faith !" cried D'Arcy, as he looked to the priming of the weapons just received, "it is an ugly business. I don't like the looks of it at all. I wonder what they have done with Dorothy ; the poor soul will be combing their hair for them if they keep her from her lady."

"I trust she is with the young Baroness by this time," said Rupert, who was filling his purse with all the coin left in a certain small inner drawer of the same cabinet. "I do not imagine Lady Helmsford would separate them. Dorothy was probably only sent on in advance."

"God knows !" replied D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "Her ladyship the Countess wouldn't hand her over to that black devil, John Langley, now ?"

"No, no ! Furious as she is, I think her incapable of such villainy ; besides, I have her own written assurance that John Langley had made no move. No ; she would not voluntarily send back her niece to that traitor."

"Well, you know best, sir."

"I wish the horses were here !" cried Rupert ; "'tis near three o'clock. We can scarce overtake them before nightfall, which will increase our difficulties tenfold."

"The horses are at the door, monsieur," said Victor.

"Good ; come along, D'Arcy."

The horses sent by Robilliard were far above the average, both in speed and strength ; and, after exchanging a few words of commendation, Rupert Langley and his follower rode on almost in unbroken silence till they reached London Bridge.

"The Tabard is near the other end of the Bridge?" asked Rupert. "I have never visited it save once."

"It is! 'Tis scarce five minutes' ride beyond."

The next moment they were passing between the curious ancient buildings that encumbered the Bridge, at this hour crowded with vehicles and passengers, for the passage was not wide enough for the traffic. The two horsemen made their way but slowly, Rupert's thoughts too busily and uneasily engaged to allow of his bestowing attention on the picturesqueness of the structure, nor that strange edifice, Nonsuch House.

At last they penetrated to the embattled gate tower on the Southwark side : here they were again stopped by the passage of a huge wagon, Rupert chafing and tearing his heart with all kinds of conjectures (none of them pleasant). At last they were clear of the Bridge, and, leaving the square towers of the fine old church, St. Mary Overy, on the right, they rode at a quick pace into the yard of the famous Tabard Inn.

It was surrounded on three sides by the house itself, round the second story of which ran a heavy wooden gallery, supported by stout wooden posts or pillars. Beneath them were benches for visitors to rest upon, while on the left side was a pump and trough, for the refreshment of their cattle.

Rupert glanced round. A post-chaise without horses stood in one corner, a wagoner was watering his beasts at the trough ; but there was no sign of Sir Stephen Compton's servants.

"No ; I will not dismount," said Rupert to the ostler and tapster, who ran out to wait upon him. "I expect three more of my company to join us here ; then we will have a cup of ale, and press on. Tell me," he continued, as a sudden thought struck him, "did Lady Helmsford pause here, in passing on her journey to the coast this

morning, about three or four hours ago? A lady traveling in some state, with two carriages?"

"No, your honor. Such a party passed, but did not stop."

"No," put in the ostler; "but yester-even a coach-and-four paused here for a while; one of the horses had gone suddenly lame, and they were forced to take another."

"And who were in the coach?" asked Rupert eagerly. "Any ladies?"

"Ay, one or two, I know! for a little dog broke away from them, and one of the ladies was in sore fear lest it should be lost."

"Was one of the ladies young?"

"I am not sure there were two on 'em; 'twas t'other ostler attended that coach. I were a-looking arter one that had just come in from Canterbury."

"And where is the other ostler? Bring him to me at once."

"Here, Bill! Why, Bill, where be ye?" And ostler number one clattered across the yard in search of the other; but he was nowhere to be found. At last a non-descript hanger-on of the establishment remembered that "Missis had sent him somewheres."

While the search was going on the three expected horsemen rode into the yard. The leader, a grave, well-dressed personage, lifting his hat, presented a note to Rupert. It contained a few lines from Sir Stephen Compton, to identify his servants, and place them at Rupert's disposal.

"You see your master's wishes," said he, handing the note to the bearer to peruse. "What is your name?"

"Hammond, sir, at your service."

Having paid for the refreshment he had ordered, Rupert and his party looked to their girths, to their horses' shoes, to their own arms, and then rode as briskly down the High Street of Southwark as heaps of offal and rubbish, loose stones and deep ruts would permit.

Rupert looked at his watch—twenty minutes to four. *How fast time flew!* How fast his heart beat as he *thought of the doubtful end which awaited his ride.*

What if Maud, turned against him by the representations or misrepresentations of her aunt, refused to return with him, what power had he to compel her? He would only have the melancholy consolation of knowing that she was safe and a free agent. He wished he had asked the Chancellor for some authority—something to back his own word.

If, on the contrary, Maud had been forced out of London (and some inner voice seemed to tell him she had), what a delicious necessity would arise of her trusting herself to him!

The approach of night would no doubt increase her reluctance to accept his protection; but, with Dorothy to bear her company, all might be arranged to spare the object of his deepest, tenderest solicitude the smallest annoyance.

If Dorothy was not with her mistress, then no doubt Maud was being treated as a prisoner; and perhaps, feeling that he was her only true disinterested friend, she might turn to him in her hour of need, and accept the relationship in which they stood to each other.

This was too delicious a thought. The effort to resist it made Rupert strike his spurs into his steed; but the next instant he checked his career, as two men and four horses turned the corner of a side road, and met him face to face.

By this time the houses at either side the street had grown more straggling and farther apart; they had nearly cleared the suburbs.

Directly Rupert saw the men just mentioned, he recognized them to be post-boys; and, although coming from the direction they did was not encouraging, he thought he would ask them whence they came.

"We have come across from Streatham," replied the man he spoke to, "and are going to the Tabard Inn, to return this 'ere brown horse, as we were forced to borrow last evening."

"Ha!" cried Rupert; "then you conveyed some of Lady Helmsford's party the first stage of their journey?"

"We did, your honor!" cried the second and younger

post-boy, pressing forward ; “and one of the ladies charged me with a message, because she could find no way to write.”

“What was it ?” cried Rupert, all eagerness.

“Nay, I won’t tell save to him it was meant for,” said the man resolutely.

“Was it an old or a young lady charged you with it ?”

“Oh, it was th’ould one ; and I would have gone straight this morning, only a gentleman came up to the inn at —, wanting horses on to his house at Streatham, so we have just come from thence.”

“Tell me,” cried Rupert, with a sudden inspiration, “was the message to be carried to Don Juan di Monteiro, in Salisbury Street, Strand ?”

“It was, sir,” replied the man in much surprise.

“I am he ! Speak.”

“I scarce know what to do ; but you look like a true man, sir. And the lady said you would give me half-a-crown.”

“Here it is,” said Rupert, drawing forth the coin, “ready for you when you have spoken.”

“Well, sir, she said, ‘Tell the gentleman that the young lady has been given up to Master John Langley ; and that she earnestly prays Don Monteiro to help her.’”

“Then where did you part with the young lady ? or did she start with you ?”

“She did, sir ; and we stopped in Great Queen Street to set her down and her boxes.”

“By Heaven, D’Arcy, your suggestion is too true !” cried Rupert. “One word more. Did an elderly—a waiting-woman—descend with the young lady ?”

“No, sir ; none but herself, and I think it warn’t all comfortable like. T’other lady cried, and had hard work to come at speech with me.”

“There’s your half-crown for you, my man, and there’s another on my own account. Come, D’Arcy ! we have to make up for lost time ! Who could have believed a woman would lay so deep a plot to betray another !”

“Faith ! it’s just what I would believe !” ejaculated

D'Arcy. "Where to now, Excellency?" For Rupert had wheeled his horse round quickly.

"To Great Queen Street; to that villain's house! Hammond, I have certain tidings of the young lady we seek, and we must turn our horses' heads in an opposite direction. Follow, all, as fast as may be, to Great Queen Street, if you lose sight of me; but keep up as well as you can."

So saying, Rupert set spurs to his horse and rode as rapidly as the various impediments offered by the Bridge and streets would permit.

"And what's your plan now, sir?" asked D'Arcy, who managed to come up alongside him.

"I have none," exclaimed Rupert, "except to force my way into the ruffian's house and search it from garret to cellar, if we do so at the sword's point! God grant we may find Mistress Maud there!"

"Amen," said D'Arcy. "But it's a chance."

Rupert did not reply; he felt he dared not think of the horrible ills that might befall—nay, might have befallen his beloved! He urged on his horse, in a whirl of fevered anticipation, the wildest visions of vengeance firing his brain. D'Arcy kept near him, but the others were soon distanced. At last they reached their goal.

Rupert, glancing down the street, saw that something unusual had occurred.

A small crowd was gathered round a mansion, half-way down. Ragged boys had perched themselves on the railing, and were pointing and jeering at some object apparently on the door-step. "Oh! look at the mad French-woman."

"She's a witch! Let's take her and duck her in Rosamond's Pool! Call the beadle, and he'll soon put her in jail for a vagrant!"

"Make way there," cried Rupert, laying about him smartly with his whip, as these and similar sentences caught his ear.

The crowd opened right and left instantly, for a well-dressed imperious gentleman; and Rupert saw, with unspeakable dismay, Dorothy seated on the door-step. Hlet

hood had fallen back, dragging her cap with it ; her gray locks dishevelled, her face covered by her hands, and her whole attitude expressive of utter, absolute despair.

"Dorothy !" cried Rupert, springing to the ground, while D'Arcy caught his rein. "Dorothy, what—what has happened ? Where is your mistress ?"

"Is it yourself, Master Monteiro ?" she cried, starting to her feet and grasping his hand in both her own. "Oh ! where have you been, to let her be taken away, and me not knowing what's become of her ? Sure, I've been shut up like a maniac, till I'm almost driven mad in earnest ; and they laugh at me here, and slap the door in mee face. I can get no word of her !"

"I will make them open !" cried Rupert. "Stand back there," he called to the crowd, "or my men who are coming up will ride over you !"

The people immediately obeyed, and Rupert proceeded to thunder at the door.

It was quickly opened by Langley's sedate, imperturbable *major domo*.

"I seek Mistress Maud Langley," said Rupert, instantly stepping on the threshold.

"She is not here, sir," was the calmly civil reply.

"Where is she gone, then ?"

"She started on her journey to Langdale Priory this morning."

"Are you lying ?" asked Rupert sternly.

"'Tis true, sir. You may enter and search the house ; and indeed some of these onlookers may have seen the party start, for there are always idlers about !"

"Did Master Langley accompany the young lady ?"

"No, sir ! Master Langley had been summoned to meet my Lord Berkeley out Roehampton way ; but my wife attended the young lady."

Rupert thought a moment ; then, seizing the man by the collar, with a sudden powerful effort, dragged him down the steps within reach of D'Arcy.

"Hold him," he said ; and D'Arcy laid a strong grasp on the astonished butler, thus making sure the door *should* not be closed.

"Tell me," said Rupert, seizing a boy from the front rank of the spectators, "what time did a traveling party leave this house to-day? or did you see one? Speak truth! I will not hurt you!"

"No, sir," blubbered the youth thus addressed; "I saw never a one. I only come in the street half an hour ago!"

"But *I* was here, and saw the coach-and-four drive off!" called out a smaller boy shrilly.

"Ha!" exclaimed Rupert; "tell me what you did see?"

"First the coach drew up, and two men a 'ossback beside it; and then another man gets up on the box, and they ties on some big leather packages; and then a mighty dark gentleman leads out a beautiful young lady, and puts her and an elderly, cross-looking woman in the coach, and they drives off!"

"What time of the day was this?" asked Rupert sharply.

"I heard the church clocks strike two a little before," said the boy.

"One word more," exclaimed Rupert, turning to D'Arcy's prisoner, "and you shall be set free! Where is Captain Harold Langley?"

"I know not, sir," replied the man sullenly. "He left here three or four days ago. I know not whither he went."

"Release him," said Rupert.

"Thank you, sir," said the man, who had not made the slightest resistance. "My master will reckon with you for the usage you have bestowed upon his servant."

"When your master has reckoned with *me* he will not be in the mood to settle many other scores!" said Rupert sternly.

"Oh, ye black-faced designing devil!" screamed Dorothy; "you are like your master! If a hair of my darling's head is hurt, I'll tear him limb from limb!"

"You shall," returned Rupert; "but for the present control yourself. D'Arcy! this story of a journey to Langdale is a blind! Had they started by the right road

at two or shortly after, we should have overtaken them ! It is but an infernal scheme to entrap Maud, and carry her to the lonely house you have reconnoitred ! You shall guide us there ; I feel certain we shall run the villains to earth ! Come, Dorothy ! pull yourself together, my woman ! You shall accompany us to cheer your fair mistress ! ”

After a short consultation with Hammond, it was determined that the elder of Sir Stephen's two servants should find Mistress Dorothy a coach with a tolerable pair of horses, and bring her after them as quickly as might be.

“ Follow the Uxbridge Road till you pass the toll-bar at Shepherd's Bush,” said D'Arcy ; “ then strike away up a lane on the right—'twill bring you to a sort of common—and then past a wide pool and clump of trees. You will see the house, and find something of a fray, or I'm much mistaken.”

“ Lose no time ! ” cried Rupert. “ Remember, my good fellow, you shall be well rewarded for this day's work.”

So saying, Rupert and the rest rode off at speed—away down Holborn and on to the Uxbridge Road—soon leaving traffic and houses behind them.

Often in his dreams, when disturbed or unwell, in after years, did the agonies of that ride—the fears that would not be silenced, the fevered impatience, the intolerable slowness of the quickest pace to which he could urge his horse—return to Rupert Langley.

It was an age of endurance, an hour burnt into his memory forever.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HAROLD LANGLEY was exceedingly puzzled to answer the question with which the last chapter but one closed, and so met it by another.

“ I hope you have not been frightened ! that you do

not mistake the motives which prompt me to arrest your progress! Will you please descend, fair cousin?"

"No, Harold, I do not please to descend! I wish to continue my journey according to your father's directions! Is it possible you dare to interfere with them?"

"Oh, sir!" cried Mistress Mathews; "what is the meaning of this? Master Langley charged me to take the utmost care of the young lady, and give her safe into the hands of her own woman, who awaits her at the Ferry! Indeed, sir, you should not ruin a poor creature's chances of employment by your pranks!"

"Come, none of this nonsense!" cried Harold coarsely. "Here, Strange, pull this woman out of the coach! and keep her away till I induce my lady to hear reason! If she won't, why we must only use other means!"

Upon this the man called Strange—a great, broad-shouldered, jovial-looking bully—stepped to the carriage and pulled forth Mistress Mathews very unceremoniously, she screaming and striking at him the while. She was hustled away round the corner of the house, Maud being almost speechless with terror and indignation at this display of brutal force. What was to become of her? Would to Heaven she was back with her guardian—there at least she would be safe from Harold!

"Your new waiting-woman shows as much fight as the old one would have done! Let her scream away," he added, removing his mask with a triumphant laugh. "There is no one to listen—no need for disguise at *my* country-seat! It's such a nice quiet spot, I thought it would be well for you to rest on your journey, and hear me plead my own cause, as you never would when we were in company. Come, sweet lady! will you deign to alight? or shall I have the happiness of lifting you out in my arms?"

Something—she could not define what—in Harold's tone turned Maud cold and sick with apprehension.

"I will descend!" she cried. "Do not attempt to touch me!"

Harold laughed unpleasantly, and stepped back, to permit of her leaving the carriage.

As soon as her foot touched the ground, she paused and looked deliberately right and left.

Before the melancholy, dilapidated house was a wide stretch of marshy common, with a distant rising ground to the right. A road, little more than a cart-track, led past a broken fence, interlaced with furze-bushes, which marked the boundary of the place. A little farther, in the direction of the high ground, was a wide, dark, sullen pool, which the level rays of the fast-sinking sun failed to touch; and beyond that a scattered clump of ragged pollard elms. Nothing could surpass the loneliness and desolation of the scene. The figures grouped round (three or four masked men on horseback); the riderless steed of the ruffian who had dealt so summarily with Maud's companion, cropping the grass; the dismounted postilions, rubbing down and attending to their blown horses, were all of life within the wide range of sight, and they were all in Harold's service!

Never before did Maud's heart so utterly despair. Mistress Mathews' cries had ceased.

"Harold!" cried Maud, shivering at the awful silence; "for Heaven's sake, see that the poor woman be not hurt! do not let them hurt her!"

"Zounds, no! None will harm her! So soon as the horses have breathed, she shall be driven back in state to the place from whence she came."

"Do not send her away!" urged Maud, her mouth feeling almost too dry to form the sounds. "Though she is a stranger, she is better than none. I prefer her to any one you can have found to wait upon me."

"I will be your lady's-maid myself," returned Harold, with another unpleasant laugh. "But come, fairest mistress! 'tis no use reconnoitering the premises; come in-doors!"

"Is it possible," cried Maud, "that you dare act thus, without your father's knowledge?"

"Fathers have flinty hearts, and are too cold and slow to satisfy a lover's impatience!" said Harold affectedly.

Maud suddenly darted to the nearest postilion.

"If you are a true Englishman," she said rapidly,

"make your way to Don Juan di Monteiro—to Salisbury Street! Tell him where I am! He will amply reward you!"

"Come!" cried Harold, seizing her rudely by the wrist. "That is a bold stroke, but it will not do. Even if the fellow ventured to give your message, the cursed Spaniard is twenty miles off on the Dover Road by this time, in chase of my Lady Helmsford! Our—I mean my emissary saw him safe off on the wrong track before *you* started. Come in, I tell you! There is no help for you. You should not compel me to be rough! I am in truth your devoted slave!"

"Do not touch me!" repeated Maud, shrinking from him. "I will enter the house without resistance, as it is vain; but mark me, Harold, when your father comes to reckon with you, I will not intercede for you, nor seek to save you from the punishment you so richly deserve!"

So saying, she walked straight into the house, followed closely by Harold, who only replied to her last words by saying, "It's a bargain."

The hall of the old mansion was of fair proportions, and the oaken floor, though sorely in need of soap and house-flannel, was in good preservation. The plaster, however, had fallen in many places, both from the walls and the ceiling; and the darkness of the staircase, and deserted aspect of the entrance, seemed to Maud in ominous keeping with her own anticipations. An open door on the left hand showed her a large, scantily-furnished room, with the remains of a roughly-spread meal upon the table, and a good fire in a wide fire-place.

"Your rooms are above," said Captain Langley. "I must trouble you to ascend."

"I prefer remaining here," replied Maud, pausing by the open door.

"I am extremely sorry to coerce you," replied Harold with a grin; "but if you will not walk upstairs, mine must be the delightful task of carrying you!"

Maud silently ascended, stopping when she reached the wide landing, off which a couple of doors and as many long dark passages opened.

"Allow me," said Harold, passing her, and unfastening one of the doors. He motioned to his prisoner to enter.

The room into which she was ushered was of good size, paneled with oak, made cheerful by a good fire, and lit by two tall narrow windows opposite the door. At the end of the room, to the left, was a recess that looked as if it ought to be a bay-window, but was paneled like the rest of the room. A square of faded carpet was spread before the fire, where was an arm-chair and two others; a worked foot-stool, the pattern much obliterated; and a queer, foreign-looking table with many legs. Evidently some attempt had been made to render the apartment habitable.

"Pray sit down by the fire, fair cousin, and let us have a talk. Will you not remove your hat and scarf? Though 'tis but a poor place, I should like to see you seem at home in *my* house. By-and-by, Maud, we shall have a grander dwelling!"

"Harold," she said, "once more, why have you brought me here?"

"To make you my wedded wife, till death us do part," he replied, seating himself opposite to her, and laying his hat and mask on the floor.

"But you know that is impossible. I *cannot* wed any one till the Langdale marriage is dissolved; nor will I, Harold. You may kill me, but you cannot force my lips to say 'yes.'"

"Well, we will see!" returned Harold, with a poor assumption of bravado. "How is it that you do not fancy me for a husband, cousin? I am sure I have sought you perseveringly! I am gone to a shadow for love of you, and now I have dared even my father's anger to secure you. Indeed, adorable cousin, if you were just a little kind, I would be your devoted slave!"

Here the sound of horses trampling and the rolling of a heavy carriage fell on Maud's ear.

"Harold!" she cried, starting from her seat and rushing to the window; "is that the coach driving away with *Mistress Mathews*?"

"I imagine it is," he replied.

"You surely have some woman here to keep me company!" exclaimed Maud, horror-struck at being left alone in the hands of such a set of ruffians as Harold's *employés* appeared to be.

The look-out from the window was melancholy and unpromising: a filthy, ragged, empty farm-yard; a half-ruined stable, through the open door of which she could see some horses feeding; and beyond, the silent, lonely common.

"You are enough to have on one's hands, without any more of your charming sex," said he, with an awkward attempt at jocularly.

"Listen, Harold!" cried Maud, almost beside herself with sickening terror, yet striving gallantly to preserve her self-control; "I believe I am at this moment Baroness Langdale. I firmly believe that before many days are over I shall be in possession of my lands. I shall be rich, and you, my cousin, need money! you are in debt, or you would never want to marry *me*! Take me back to your father—to Lady Helmsford's house—to Lord Chedworth—to any one—and I will pay your debts! I will give you half my fortune!"

Harold listened with a strong inclination to come to terms. He was neither nice nor sensitive, but he did not like the task his father had set him. He was not strong enough either to love or hate intensely, and to do anything disagreeable was intolerable to him.

"You may trust me, Harold," she resumed, seeing that he hesitated. "I would not break my word!"

"Ay, most generous kinswoman!" he said, laughing, as he collected his thoughts, and saw the uselessness of the proposition; "but you will be a minor for nearly two years longer; besides, you forget I am in love with you!" and he seized her hand. "So nothing short of—"

A sudden heavy knock startled him. He let go the hand Maud was struggling to withdraw, and opened the door a few inches. A short colloquy in gruff whispers ensued, and then Harold, turning to her, said:

"Pray forgive me for my discourtesy! I am compelled to leave you for a while;" and immediately left the room, turning the key, however, audibly as he did so.

Left alone, Maud relaxed the strain of her self-control and yielded to an agony of tears, which somewhat relieved her.

Then she surveyed her prison. The recess, she found, was a bay-window, closely shuttered, and too securely fastened for her to open. The other windows seemed to be in the side of the mansion, nor could her efforts open them.

She observed the fading light. Was it possible that she was beyond the reach of help? The glass, set in leaden lattice-work, seemed thick and strong. A sound or cry could scarce penetrate it.

What should she do? She looked round despairingly; her eye was caught by the fire-irons—a poker and pair of tongs. She seized the former, and, with as little noise as she could make, broke several of the small panes of glass, so that she might call to any possible passer-by.

Then, with fear and trembling, she pushed open a door on the right of the fireplace. It led into a large bedroom, scantily furnished—one window completely stopped up and another partially. A gloomy, repellent chamber, with a small, mysterious-looking door in the paneling at the farther side of the bed—a room into which Maud resolved not again to enter. She returned to the fireside, and, sitting down by the table, rested her arms upon it, covering her face with her hands, and, after an earnest prayer for help, abandoned herself to a painful broken succession of memories and anticipations.

Meantime, Harold had obeyed a summons from his father, and found him in the room below, where he was impatiently awaiting the saddling of another horse, his own having cast a shoe.

"'Tis the only check we have had," he observed. "Even now, if those unhandy knaves would but hasten, I would have time enough to gallop back to the Horse-ferry, mount the steed I left there, and reach my Lord

Berkeley in time ! None could then for a moment suspect my complicity in this plot. How does our captive seem ? ”

“ Less outrageous than I expected, but very deadly and resolute. She offered to pay my debts and divide her fortune with me if I would take her safe back to *you*. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ’twas a tempting offer.”

“ Fool ! ” muttered John Langley. “ Harold, you will never be worthy of me ! Now I have put fortune once more within your grasp. I have done all the work, and done it well.”

“ You have indeed, sir ! What did you do with that witch Dorothy ? ”

“ Oh, she went to prepare her mistress’s lodgings in Bow Street, in the house of a worthy couple who are a little behind with their rent. They turned the key on her by mistake ; and were not to unlock the door till past three to-day. I dare say she is now roaming the streets, finding her bird flown, if she is not already taken up as a mad-woman.”

“ The Countess proved our best friend after all.”

“ Ay, Harold ! she surpasses us in scheming by a good deal ; but it was a narrow chance our securing the heiress.”

After a little more talk, and arranging how John Langley’s search for the fugitives was to seem eager and yet be misdirected, he exclaimed :

“ I will go forth myself, and mount at the back of the house. I marvel what keeps them ; why, it is more than six o’clock ! Farewell, Harold ! The game is in your own hands ; see that you play it out boldly and *relentlessly* ! ”

He turned to go, when Harold exclaimed eagerly, “ Listen ! ”

Langley paused, his hand on the lock.

“ ’Tis but the wind,” he said.

“ It is the tramp of more horses than one,” cried Harold uneasily.

“ You are nervous,” said his father with a sneer. “ ’Tis but some stray gentlemen of the road.”

“ Our men are safe out of sight ? ” asked Harold.

"Ay, they are in the kitchen at the back ; there is nothing to attract attention to this deserted-looking place. They will be past directly."

The sounds grew nearer and more distinct. Father and son stood perfectly still, and the next moment a long piercing cry from somewhere over their heads rang out through the still evening air :

"Help ! help ! for God's sake, help !"

"How has she contrived to open the windows ? Run, Harold ; stop her !"

But Harold was already halfway upstairs ; and, even while he went, the sound of footsteps approaching, a loud knocking at the door, a shout of "Open, in the King's name !" put John Langley on his mettle, and roused his inventive mind to a last effort.

The door remaining closed, the sounds of several feet trampling rapidly round the end of the house, warned him that the new comers were seeking another mode of ingress. He dropped his mask, threw off his cloak, and stood back behind the door.

Maud had sat for some time in a state of semi-stupefaction, till the first distant sound of horses' feet struck her ear and startled her into intense eager life and watchfulness. She darted to the window, and pressed her little ear against the broken panes. Yes ! some one—more than one—rode towards her prison-house. Some deliverers sent by God ! She waited yet a moment ; and then, with all the force she could muster, sent forth the long wailing shriek which had alarmed her jailers.

She had just repeated it, when Harold burst into the room, dragged her from the window, and would no doubt have stifled her cries had his right arm not been useless.

"Hush, or it will be worse for you ! By ——, you'll force me to silence you for ever ! What do you want, you wild cat ?"

Undeterred by his threats, Maud struggled to reach the door, calling as loud as she could for assistance, while sounds of oaths and the clash of steel, a heavy fall, a rush of feet, came up from below. All passed quicker than it *can be written* ; then the door was flung violently open,

and Rupert Langley, followed by D'Arcy and two others, crowded into the room.

At sight of him, Maud stretched out her arms and made an attempt to dart towards him ; but Harold himself was between them.

"Insolent adventurer !" he cried, "how dare you intrude yourself into my house ?"

"Base schemer ! how dare *you* molest and imprison the Baroness Langdale ? Stand back ! I defer your punishment until I have delivered the lady from your vile hands."

He sprang upon Harold as he spoke ; but as he touched him, John Langley, followed by two or three men, came quickly out of the inner room, to Maud's terror and astonishment.

"Stop !" he exclaimed in a voice so hard and collected that all paused to listen.

Maud drew behind the great chair, and Rupert's attention was diverted from his foe.

"You, Sir Spaniard, must accept *me* as your antagonist—my son's sword-arm is disabled—that is, unless you hear reason and quit the house. *I* am here to rescue and defend my ward. Some time after she set out on her journey, I accidentally discovered my son's mad and reprehensible scheme to intercept and carry her off. I lost no time in hastening after her ; and was in the act of rebuking my son when you broke rudely in. You are, I suppose, sent by the Countess of Helmsford ; but I shall myself escort the young lady to her house. Now, sir, be wise—go in peace ! I have a larger force than yours, and the power of the law behind me."

"Treacherous dog !" cried Rupert ; "I come to deliver her from you as well as from your son. Stand back, or not even her presence shall save your life ! I am no Spaniard. Look on me, murderer, and you will see I am the son and avenger of Rupert Langley !" He dashed aside his feathered hat as he spoke ; and John Langley recoiled a step or two, yet rallied again quickly.

"Come on !" cried Rupert to his followers, "our business is to remove this lady, if it cost the life of every

man opposed to us." He flashed out his sword as he spoke and crossed that of Langley.

"Be warned," cried the latter, "I have the legal right of guardian over this lady. Beware you fall not foul of the law!"

At these words Sir Stephen Compton's servants hesitated visibly, and looked at each other.

"And I have the legal right of a husband to remove her," exclaimed Rupert. "Speak, dear Maud; am I not your husband?"

"You are, you are!" she cried, stretching out her arms to him. "I am his wife, Master Langley, as *you* know, who were present at our wedding. Let me go to my husband" (for Langley had caught her arm as she attempted to rush towards Rupert).

"Dare not to touch her!" he cried, infuriated by this. "Defend yourself!" and he attacked Langley so fiercely, that he was compelled to let Maud go! she immediately flew to D'Arcy, who placed himself before her sword in hand.

"If any gentleman would like a little practice, I should be happy to oblige him," he said, blandly addressing the men who, with Harold, stood astonished hearers of the altercation.

The Compton servants, too, completely reassured by this sudden revelation, pressed forward.

"If you are indeed Rupert's son," exclaimed John Langley, defending himself without attacking in return, "you are a rebel and an outlaw, whom all good subjects are bound to capture or punish."

"I am neither," said Rupert, dropping the point of his rapier; "I have this day received the King's permission to enter his service, through the intercession of Sir Stephen Compton, who sent his servants to assist me in rescuing the Baroness Langdale—my lady—my wife—from you. Look at their liveries and satisfy yourself. Your game is over, crafty bloodhound! your schemes defeated; yet will you not receive the full measure due to your iniquities! Conduct Lady Langdale downstairs, D'Arcy. The first who stirs to follow is a dead man."

Rupert drew a pistol from his belt, cocked and presented it.

"My barkers are below," cried Harold, who had attempted to interpose two or three times, but had been disregarded—"My barkers are below, or you should not have it all your own way."

"Be silent," said his father, turning on him, his cheek ashy pale, the blood sprung on his lip where he had pressed his teeth, in the rage of baffled craft—"there is no more to be said now." He sheathed his sword with a sudden click, and stood looking silently on the floor, already, no doubt, planning how he should color the affair in explaining it to his chief.

Meanwhile, Rupert backed slowly from the room, keeping his eyes fixed on the men opposed to him, then darted quickly downstairs. At the foot he found Sir Stephen Compton's two servants waiting sword in hand to defend the retreat of D'Arcy and Maud, who stood in the doorway, the light, which was still strong in the west, falling on their figures. Maud was clasping his arm with both her hands, her face turned to his shoulder as if to shut out the place from her sight.

Rupert sprang to her side, as soon as he had uncocked his pistol and thrust it in his belt.

"Lean on me, dear cousin. Quick, D'Arcy—the horses! Come, my good Hammond, let us to your master's as fast as we can."

They hurried to the front of the house where the horses had been tied to the palings and a stunted, broken tree.

"How shall we convey you?" cried Rupert to Maud. "You tremble as if you could scarce stand; suffer me to hold you!" He passed his arm round her with a tender reluctance, dreading she might think he would presume upon the admission she had just made. "Nor could you, I fear, keep your seat on horseback."

"Oh, do not trouble about my strength! I am well able to walk—only take me away to a place of safety, dear Rupert! I cannot breathe here!" and too terrified and distraught by the violent scene she had just witnessed, and the long strain her nerves had endured, to think of

delicate scruples, she clung closely to him, while he felt her heart throb wildly under his supporting hand.

"Be comforted, dear heart," he whispered lovingly. "You are safe; all will be well. I am taking you to a good kind lady who will cherish you!" Then, turning to the rest: "Keep close round us," he said; "though I do not fear the slightest molestation. John Langley will never resist law or authority. Yet, let us put some distance between us and that accursed house!"

"Ah, Dorothy! where is Dorothy?" murmured Maud, suddenly stopping.

"She is also safe and well. She is following in our footsteps, and will soon be here. Then you will have her companionship on the way to Sir Stephen Compton's."

"I shall have Dorothy! Oh, thank God, all will indeed be well! See! I am better and stronger already. I can walk now with the help of your arm, kindest cousin."

She drew herself gently from him, but held his arm with both hands, looking up in his face trustingly, with grateful tear-gemmed eyes; so that Rupert, though anxious to see her safe, was for a moment wrapped in a haze of heavenly happiness, and ever since declared that his idea of paradise was inseparably associated with a background of wide, scrubby, desolate common.

"She ought to be here by this time, though a coach travels but slowly! Your man, is he prompt and intelligent?" said Rupert to Hammond.

"He is, sir; he will execute orders punctually and satisfactorily."

A few more paces in silence, and then D'Arcy said:

"I hear horses and wheels; I will ride on and hasten them."

They had by this time neared a second clump of trees—solemn, ghostly poplars—and round it came, to Maud's joy, a coach, accompanied by a man on horseback; while from the window protruded a head, and hand at arm's length, both shaking and gesticulating vehemently.

The next moment that excellent creature, Dorothy,

had darted out with a bound, and had caught her darling lady in her arms.

"Oh, my jewel! my honey! are you safe and well? Oh, sir! Master Monteiro, I hope you and D'Arcy have not left a whole bone in one of them villains' skins! My darling! you are all of a thrimble, and no wonder! Ah, speak to me!"

But Maud could only kiss and embrace her faithful nurse. She felt and seemed exhausted. She was glad to enter the carriage, and leaning against Dorothy, who supported her in her arms, to counteract the rough jolting which they endured.

Rupert rode by the carriage door, and from his intermittent talk with Dorothy, Maud had gathered particulars of her aunt's base treachery, which but for poor Letitia Sparrow, would have resulted in the ruin of her happiness for life. She shuddered to think how narrow had been her escape. Dorothy also detailed her own sufferings: how when, to her surprise, she found her door at length unlocked, she sallied downstairs, and met the master of the house, who expressed his great regret at the unfortunate accident; the door had been locked by mistake, no one knowing she was there; whereupon Dorothy gave him a piece of her mind, *i. e.*, a torrent of vehement abuse, and, calling a chair, proceeded as fast as she could to Lady Helmsford's, where she found poor little Gomez, who had run away from Mistress Ferrars; both were denied admittance, and then Dorothy came to the conclusion that Maud had been betrayed into John Langley's custody; to his house Gomez was able to lead her, and while she was creating the disturbance we have described, the little negro slipped away to seek his all-powerful patron, Don Monteiro.

At last a smoother road and increasing houses showed they were once more within a civilized district; and in another quarter of an hour they stopped before the great gates of Sir Stephen Compton's residence.

The door was quickly thrown open at the sound of their arrival, and as the light from the hall streamed out upon the dusk evening, Maud could see an elegant-

looking gentleman and a tall lady advancing to the threshold.

Rupert assisted Maud to alight, and, closely followed by Dorothy, led her to her host.

"I have the honor of committing the Baroness Langdale to your care, Sir Stephen, in accordance with the Lord Chancellor, her legal guardian's direction," he said.

"It is with joy and pride I receive her," said the polite Baronet, kissing her hand, and then placing it in that of his daughter. "Mistress Compton will be charmed to receive you as a sister."

In effect, that kind lady embraced Maud with tears in her eyes, and conducted her into the library, where supper was laid; while Sir Stephen gave orders that D'Arcy and the rest should be hospitably entertained.

"What a day's work!" he exclaimed, as Rupert gave a hasty sketch of the rescue. "What a scoundrel that Langley is. Well, at any rate, your fortune is made, my friend! The young heiress will never part with so gallant a husband."

"I do not think of that at present," returned Rupert, the thermometer of whose hopes and joys had been steadily falling since Maud had passed from his care. "She has been sorely tried; let her have time to recover."

They entered the library, and found Maud, Mistress Compton, and Dorothy standing together, the two latter in eager conversation.

"We only waited your coming, sir," said Mistress Compton. "Lady Langdale wishes to say 'good-night' and a few words to her brave preserver!"

"To whom I owe everything," said Maud, stepping forward—her pretty hat thrown off, her bright brown hair in rich confusion. "Rupert"—she paused and looked down, the delicate color mantling on her cheek—"I want to thank you—and I cannot."

She held out both her hands. Rupert sprang forward, clasped and kissed them.

"I want no thanks," he said in a low voice; "I deserve none. Who would not strive to save that which is *dearer than life*? but I shall see you to-morrow, when

you will be calm, and not urged by feeling to admit more than your sober judgment would approve. Remember"—he looked round as he spoke, and again kissing Maud's hands, let them go gently—"remember, this dear lady is free of all claims from me! whatever the urgency of her great danger may have induced her to admit! Good-night, sweet cousin! Sir Stephen, I have some way farther to ride. I must—"

He hesitated and half turned away; his voice was unsteady, and had a degree of pathos in its tone which moved Maud strangely. She made a quick movement to him, and clasped both her arms round his, pressing it to her, and looking into his face, too earnest in her desire to show her trust in his truth and honor to shrink from his gaze.

"Ah, do not go! I only feel safe when you are with me! Stay with me, dear Rupert! stay with your wife!"

As she uttered the word deliberately, with a slight pause before speaking it, she hid her face against his shoulder with an inexpressibly graceful gesture of abandonment to her love for him, which sent all Rupert's brave resolutions to be generous and self-denying to the winds.

"My own—at last—my own!" he exclaimed, clasping his arms round her with passionate delight, and, regardless of the onlookers, pressing his lips to hers in a long, intense kiss—a kiss that to Maud was a revelation.

"My dear sir," cried Sir Stephen, "this is as it should be! The fair lady is quite right—I trust you will not leave us to-night! we counted on your company! and to-morrow we will summon the worthy vicar of this parish, and tie the nuptial-knot in a more orthodox fashion than it was originally! I give this advice seriously. We know not what may occur; but a real marriage, under the approval of His Majesty, cannot be interfered with! After the ceremony, you may go to my country-seat in Hertfordshire ('tis but a few hours' journey) for a short honeymoon; and I will to the King with a history of the romantic rescue and wedding. Shall it not be so, sweet Lady Langdale?"

"It shall be as you all, good, kind friends, advise," said Maud softly, now palpitating and a little frightened

at her own daring, though her hand still lay in Rupert's.

"And, at any rate," he remarked, "whatever fate may await the Heritage of Langdale, Maud Langley, my queen, my beloved, will be mine!"

Does the reader care to know more? We will hope so. All was done as sketched by the polite Sir Stephen,

The Government had no stancher adherent than Sir Rupert Langley—as he became a year or two after—and early in George the Second's reign he was created Baron Langdale, in return for his diplomatic services.

John Langley, though defeated in his favorite scheme, was always a prosperous, though a gloomy man.

Harold, after a melancholy career as a "pretty fellow," "a beau," "a macaroni," was killed in a duel, arising out of a dispute at cards; after which his father seemed to lose all taste for public life, and became a mere miser. Dying intestate and without heirs, his property lapsed to the Crown.

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The villagers, thriving in the neighborhood of a resident landlord who cared for their prosperity, delighted to meet the little lord and ladies, in charge of a solemn, gaunt, grim old man with gray mustache—worn foreign *fashion*—who was their tutor in all manual exercises and *horsemanship*, while the authoritative Mistress Dorothy

ruled the women, and even dominated the men, save one—a black page or footman of my lady's—who generally kept the servants' hall in a roar by his humorous absurdities.

Old Merrick still presided at the Crown and Scepter. His favorite tale, when well warmed with prime October, was the strange adventures of the day when Captain Langley's horse broke loose, and he himself was kidnapped, with all the wondrous results which sprang from the weird wedding of the Heiress of Langdale.

THE END.

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